

POEMS,

BY

JOHN WILSON.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

A NEW EDITION.

VOL. I.

THE ISLE OF PALMS.

THE CITY OF THE PLAGUE.

THE CONVICT.

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TO
ALEXANDER BLAIR,
HIS BEST AND DEAREST FRIEND.
THESE VOLUMES ARE INSCRIBED
BY THE AUTHOR.

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THE
ISLE OF PALMS.

CANTO FIRST.

VOL. I.

A



THE
ISLE OF PALMS.

CANTO FIRST.

IT is the midnight hour :—the beauteous Sea,
Calm as the cloudless heaven, the heaven discloses,
While many a sparkling star, in quiet glee,
Far down within the watery sky reposes.
As if the Ocean's heart were stirr'd
With inward life, a sound is heard,
Like that of dreamer murmuring in his sleep ;
'Tis partly the billow, and partly the air
That lies like a garment floating fair
Above the happy deep.
The sea, I ween, cannot be fann'd
By evening freshness from the land,
For the land it is far away ;
But God hath will'd that the sky-born breeze
In the centre of the loneliest seas
Should ever sport and play.

The mighty Moon she sits above,
Encircled with a zone of love,
A zone of dim and tender light
That makes her wakeful eye more bright :
She seems to shine with a sunny ray,
And the night looks like a mellow'd day !
The gracious Mistress of the Main
Hath now an undisturbed reign,
And from her silent throne looks down,
As upon children of her own,
On the waves that lend their gentle breast
In gladness for her couch of rest !

My spirit sleeps amid the calm
The sleep of a new delight ;
And hopes that she ne'er may awake again,
But for ever hang o'er the lovely main,
And adore the lovely night.
Scarce conscious of an earthly frame,
She glides away like a lambent flame,
And in her bliss she sings ;
Now touching softly the Ocean's breast,
Now mid the stars she lies at rest,
As if she sail'd on wings !
Now bold as the brightest star that glows
More brightly since at first it rose,

Looks down on the far-off Flood,
And there all breathless and alone,
As the sky where she soars were a world of her own,
She mocketh that gentle Mighty One
As he lies in his quiet mood.
“ Art thou,” she breathes, “ the Tyrant grim
That scoffs at human prayers,
Answering with prouder roar the while,
As it rises from some lonely isle
Through groans raised wild, the hopeless hymn
Of shipwreck’d mariners ?
Oh ! Thou art harmless as a child
Weary with joy, and reconciled
For sleep to change its play ;
And now that night hath stay’d thy race,
Smiles wander o’er thy placid face
As if thy dreams were gay.”—

And can it be that for me alone
The Main and Heavens are spread ?
Oh ! whither, in this holy hour,
Have those fair Creatures fled,
To whom the ocean-plains are given
As clouds possess their native heaven ?
The tiniest boat, that ever sail’d
Upon an inland lake,

Might through this sea without a fear
Her silent journey take,
Though the helmsman slept as if on land,
And the oar had dropp'd from the rower's hand.
How like a monarch would she glide,
While the husht billow kiss'd her side
With low and lulling tone,
Some stately Ship, that from afar
Shone sudden, like a rising star,
With all her bravery on !
List ! how in murmurs of delight
The blessed airs of Heaven invite
The joyous Bark to pass one night
Within their still domain !
O grief ! that yonder gentle Moon,
Whose smiles for ever fade so soon,
Should waste such smiles in vain.
Haste ! haste ! before the moonshine dies
Dissolved amid the morning skies,
While yet the silvery glory lies
Above the sparkling foam ;
Bright mid surrounding brightness, Thou,
Scattering fresh beauty from thy prow,
In pomp and splendour come !

And lo ! upon the murmuring waves
A glorious Shape appearing !

A broad-wing'd Vessel, through the shower
Of glimmering lustre steering !
As if the beauteous ship enjoy'd
The beauty of the sea,
She lifteth up her stately head
And saileth joyfully.
A lovely path before her lies,
A lovely path behind ;
She sails amid the loveliness
Like a thing with heart and mind.
Fit pilgrim through a scene so fair
Slowly she beareth on ;
A glorious phantom of the deep,
Risen up to meet the Moon.
The Moon bids her tenderest radiance fall
On her wavy streamer and snow-white wings,
And the quiet voice of the rocking sea
To cheer the gliding vision sings.
Oh ! ne'er did sky and water blend
In such a holy sleep,
Or bathe in brighter quietude
A roamer of the deep.
So far the peaceful soul of Heaven
Hath settled on the sea,
It seems as if this weight of calm
Were from eternity.

O World of Waters ! the steadfast earth
Ne'er lay entranced like Thee !

Is she a vision wild and bright,
That sails amid the still moon-light
At the dreaming soul's command ?
A vessel borne by magic gales,
All rigg'd with gossamery sails,
And bound for Fairy-land ?
Ah ! no !—an earthly freight she bears,
Of joys and sorrows, hopes and fears ;
And loney as she seems to be,
Thus left by herself on the moonlight sea
In loneliness that rolls,
She hath a constant company,
In sleep, or waking revelry,
Five hundred human souls !
Since first she sail'd from fair England,
Three moons her path have cheer'd ;
And another lights her lovelier lamp
Since the Cape hath disappear'd.
For an Indian Isle she shapes her way
With constant mind both night and day
She seems to hold her home in view,
And sails, as if the path she knew ;

So calm and stately is her motion
Across th' unfathom'd trackless ocean.

And well, glad Vessel ! mayst thou stem
The tide with lofty breast,
And lift thy queen-like diadem
O'er these thy realms of rest :
For a thousand beings, now far away,
Behold thee in their sleep,
And hush their beating hearts to pray
That a calm may clothe the deep.
When dimly descending behind the sea
From the Mountain Isle of Liberty,
Oh ! many a sigh pursued thy vanish'd sail :
And oft an eager crowd will stand
With straining gaze on the Indian strand,
Thy wonted gleam to hail.
For thou art laden with Beauty and Youth,
With Honour bold and spotless Truth,
With fathers, who have left in a home of rest
Their infants smiling at the breast,
With children who have bade their parents farewell,
Or who go to the land where their parents dwell.
God speed thy course, thou gleam of delight !
From rock and tempest clear ;

Till signal gun from friendly height
Proclaim, with thundering cheer,
To joyful groups on the harbour bright,
That the good ship HOPE is near !

Is no one on the silent deck
Save the helmsman who sings for a breeze,
And the sailors who pace their midnight watch,
Still as the slumbering seas ?
Yes ! side by side, and hand in hand,
Close to the prow two figures stand,
Their shadows never stir,
And fondly as the moon doth rest
Upon the Ocean's gentle breast,
So fond they look on her.
They gaze and gaze till the beauteous orb
Seems made for them alone :
They feel as if their home were Heaven,
And the earth a dream that hath flown.
Softly they lean on each other's breast,
In holy bliss reposing,
Like two fair clouds to the vernal air,
In folds of beauty closing.
The tear down their glad faces rolls,
And a silent prayer is in their souls,

While the voice of awaken'd memory,
Like a low and plaintive melody,
Sings in their hearts,—a mystic voice,
That bids them tremble and rejoice.
And Faith, who oft had lost her power
In the darkness of the midnight hour,
When the planets had roll'd afar,
Now stirs in their soul with a joyful strife,
Embued with a genial spirit of life
By the Moon and the Morning-Star.

A lovelier vision in the moonlight stands,
Than Bard e'er woo'd in fairy lands.
Or Faith with tranced eye adored.
Floating around our dying Lord.
Her silent face is saintly-pale,
And sadness shades it like a veil :
A consecrated nun she seems,
Whose waking thoughts are deep as dreams,
And in her hush'd and dim abode
For ever dwell upon her God,
Though the still fount of tears and sighs,
And human sensibilities !
Well may the Moon delight to shed
Her softest radiance round that head,

And mellow the cool ocean-air
That lifts by fits her sable hair.
These mild and melancholy eyes
Are dear unto the starry skies,
As the dim effusion of their rays
Blends with the glimmering light that plays
O'er the blue heavens, and snowy clouds,
The cloud-like sails, and radiant shrouds.
Fair creature ! Thou dost seem to be
Some wandering spirit of the sea,
That dearly loves the gleam of sails,
And o'er them breathes propitious gales.
Hither thou comest, for one wild hour,
With him thy sinless paramour,
To gaze, while the wearied sailors sleep,
On this beautiful phantom of the deep,
That seem'd to rise with the rising Moon.
—But the Queen of Night will be sinking soon,
Then will you, like two breaking waves,
Sink softly to your coral caves,
Or, noiseless as the falling dew,
Melt into Heaven's delicious blue.

Nay ! wrong her not, that Virgin bright !
Her face is bathed in lovelier light
Than ever flow'd from eyes

Of Ocean Nymph, or Sylph of Air !
The tearful gleam, that trembles there,
From human dreams must rise.
Let the Mermaid rest in her sparry cell,
Her sea-green ringlets braiding !
The Sylph in viewless ether dwell,
In clouds her beauty shading !
My soul devotes her music wild
To one who is an earthly child,
But who, wandering through the midnight hour,
Far from the shade of earthly bower,
Bestows a tender loveliness,
A deeper, holier quietness,
On the moonlight Heaven, and Ocean hoar,
So quiet and so fair before.
Yet why does a helpless maiden roam,
Mid stranger souls, and far from home,
Across the faithless deep ?
Oh ! fitter far that her gentle mind
In some sweet inland vale should find
An undisturbed sleep !

So was it once. Her childish years
Like clouds pass'd o'er her head,
When life is all one rosy smile, or tears
Of natural grief, forgotten soon as shed.

O'er her own mountains, like a bird
Glad wandering from its nest,
When the glossy hues of the sunny spring
Are dancing on its breast,
With a winged glide this maiden would rove,
An innocent phantom of beauty and love.
Far from the haunts of men she grew
By the side of a lonesome tower,
Like some solitary mountain-flower,
Whose veil of wiry dew
Is only touch'd by the gales that breathe
O'er the blossoms of the fragrant heath,
And in its silence melts away
With those sweet things too pure for earthly day.
Blest was the lore that Nature taught
The infant's happy mind,
Even when each light and happy thought
Pass'd onwards like the wind,
Nor longer seem'd to linger there
Than the whispering sound in her raven-hair.
Well was she known to each mountain-stream,
As its own voice, or the fond moon-beam
That o'er its music play'd :
The loneliest caves her footsteps heard,
In lake and tarn oft nightly stirr'd
The Maiden's ghost-like shade.

But she hath bidden a last farewell
To lake and mountain, stream and dell,
And fresh have blown the gales
For many a mournful night and day,
Wafting the tall Ship far away
From her dear native Wales.

And must these eyes,—so soft and mild,
As angel's bright, as fairy's wild,
Swimming in lustrous dew,
Now sparkling lively, gay, and glad,
And now their spirit melting sad
In smiles of gentlest blue,—
Oh ! must these eyes be steep'd in tears,
Bedimm'd with dreams of future years,
Of what may yet betide
An Orphan-Maid !—for in the night,
She oft hath started with affright,
To find herself a bride ;
A bride oppress'd with fear and shame,
And bearing not Fitz-Owen's name.
This fearful dream oft haunts her bed,
For she hath heard of maidens sold,
In the innocence of thoughtless youth,
To Guilt and Age for gold ;
Of English maids who pined away

Beyond the Eastern Main,
Who smiled, when first they trod that shore,
But never smiled again.
In dreams is she such wretched Maid,
An Orphan, helpless, sold, betray'd !
And, when the dream hath fled,
In waking thought she still retains
The memory of these wildering pains,
In strange mysterious dread.

Yet oft will happier dreams arise
Before her charmed view,
And the powerful beauty of the skies
Makes her believe them true.
For who, when nought is heard around,
But the great Ocean's solemn sound,
Feels not as if the Eternal God
Were speaking in that dread abode ?
An answering voice seems kindly given
From the multitude of stars in Heaven :
And oft a smile of moonlight fair,
To perfect peace hath changed despair.
Low as we are, we blend our fate
With things so beautifully great,
And though opprest with heaviest grief,
From Nature's bliss we draw relief,

Assured that God's most gracious eye
Beholds us in our misery,
And sends mild sound and lovely sight,
To change that misery to delight.
Such is thy faith, O sainted Maid !
Pensive and pale, but not afraid
Of Ocean or of Sky,
Though thou ne'er mayst see the land again,
And though awful be the lonely Main,
No fears hast thou to die.
Whate'er betide of weal or woe,
When the waves are asleep, or the tempests blow,
Thou wilt bear with calm devotion ;
For duly every night and morn,
Sweeter than Mermaid's strains are borne
Thy hymns along the Ocean.

And who is He that fondly presses
Close to his heart the silken tresses
That hide her soften'd eyes,
Whose heart her heaving bosom meets,
And through the midnight silence beats
To feel her rising sighs ?
Worthy the Youth, I ween, to rest
On the fair swellings of her breast,

Worthy to hush her inmost fears,
And kiss away her struggling tears :
For never grovelling spirit stole
A woman's unpolluted soul !
To her the vestal fire is given ;
And only fire drawn pure from Heaven
Can on Love's holy shrine descend,
And there in clouds of fragrance blend.
Well do I know that stately Youth !
The broad day-light of cloudless truth
Like a sun-beam bathes his face ;
Though silent, still a gracious smile,
That rests upon his eyes the while,
Bestows a speaking grace.
That smile hath might of magic art,
To sway at will the stoniest heart,
As a ship obeys the gale ;
And when his silver voice is heard,
The coldest blood is warmly stirr'd,
As at some glorious tale.
The loftiest spirit never saw
This Youth without a sudden awé ;
But vain the transient feeling strove
Against the stealing power of love.
Soon as they felt the tremor cease,
He seem'd the very heart of peace ;

Majestic to the bold and high,
Yet calm and beauteous to a woman's eye !

To him, a mountain Youth, was known
The wailing tempest's dreariest tone.
He knew the shriek of wizard caves,
And the trampling fierce of howling waves.
The mystic voice of the lonely night,
He had often drunk with a strange delight,
And look'd on the clouds as they roll'd on high,
Till with them he sail'd on the sailing sky.
And thus hath he learn'd to wake the lyre,
With something of a bardlike fire ;
Can tell in high empassion'd song,
Of worlds that to the Bard belong,
And, till they feel his kindling breath,
To others still and dark as death.
Yet oft, I ween, in gentler mood
A human kindness hush'd his blood,
And sweetly blended earth-born sighs
With the Bard's romantic ecstasies.
The living world was dear to him,
And in his waking hours more bright it seem'd,
More touching far, than when his fancy dream'd
Of heavenly bowers, th' abode of Seraphim :

And gladly from her wild sojourn
Mid haunts dim-shadow'd in the realms of mind,
Even like a wearied dove that flies for rest
Back o'er long fields of air unto her nest,
His longing spirit homewards would return
To meet once more the smile of human kind.
And when at last a human soul he found,
Pure as the thought of purity,—more mild
Than in its slumber seems a dreaming child ;
When on his spirit stole the mystic sound,
The voice, whose music sad no mortal ear
But his can rightly understand and hear,
When a subduing smile like moonlight shone
On him for ever, and for him alone,
Why should he seek this lower world to leave !
For, whether now he love to joy or grieve,
A friend he hath for sorrow or delight,
Who lends fresh beauty to the morning light,
The tender stars in tenderer dimness shrouds,
And glorifies the Moon among her clouds.

How would he gaze with reverent eye
Upon that meek and pensive maid,
Then fix his looks upon the sky
With moving lips as if he pray'd !

Unto his sight bedimm'd with tears,
How beautiful the Saint appears,—
Oh, all unlike a creature form'd of clay !
The blessed angels with delight
Might hail her “ Sister !” She is bright
And innocent as they.
Scarce dared he then that form to love !
A solemn impulse from above
All earthly hopes forbade,
And with a pure and holy flame,
As if in truth from Heaven she came,
He gazed upon the maid.
His beating heart, thus fill'd with awe,
In her the guardian spirit saw
Of all his future years ;
And when he listen'd to her breath
So spiritual, nor pain nor death
Seem'd longer worth his fears.
She loved him ! She, the Child of Heaven !
And God would surely make
The soul to whom that love was given
More perfect for her sake.
Each look, each word, of one so good
Devoutly he obey'd,
And trusted that a gracious eye
Would ever guide his destiny,

For whom in holy solitude
A kneeling Angel pray'd.

Those days of tranquil joy are fled,
And tears of deep distress
From night to morn hath Mary shed :
And, say ! when sorrow bow'd her head
Did he then love her less ?
Ah no ! more touching beauty rose
Through the dim paleness of her woes,
Than when her cheek did bloom
With joy's own lustre : something there,
A saint-like calm, a deep repose,
Made her look like a spirit fair,
New risen from the tomb.
For ever in his heart shall dwell
The voice with which she said farewell
To the fading English shore ;
It dropp'd like dew upon his ear,
And for the while he ceased to hear
The sea-wind's freshening roar.
“ To thee I trust my sinless child :
• And therefore am I reconciled
To bear my lonely lot,
The Gracious One, who loves the good,
For her will smooth the Ocean wild,

Nor in her aged solitude
A parent he forgot."
The last words these her mother spake,
Sobbing as if her heart would break,
Upon the cold sea-shore,
When onwards with the favouring gale,
Glad to be free, in pride of sail
Th' impatient Vessel bore.

Oh ! could she now in magic glass
Behold the winged Glory pass
With a slow and cloud-like motion,
While, as they melted on her eye,
She scarce should ken the peaceful sky
From the still more peaceful Ocean !
And it may be such dreams are given
In mercy by indulgent Heaven,
To solace them that mourn :
The absent bless our longing sight,
The future shews than truth more bright,
And phantoms of expired delight
Most passing sweet return.
Mother ! behold thy child : How still
Her upward face ! She thinks on thee :
Oh ! thou canst never gaze thy fill !
How beautiful such piety !

There, in her lover's guardian arms
She rests : and all the wild alarms
Of waves or winds are hush'd, no more to rise.
Of thee, and thee alone, she thinks :
See ! on her knees thy daughter sinks :
Sure God will bless the prayer that lights such eyes !
Didst thou e'er think thy child so fair ?
The rapture of her granted prayer
Hath breathed that awful beauty through her face :
Once more upon the deck she stands,
Slowly unclasps her pious hands,
And brightening smiles, assured of heavenly grace.

Oh, blessed pair ! and, while I gaze,
As beautiful as blest !
Emblem of all your future days
Seems now the Ocean's rest !
Beyond the blue depths of the sky
The Tempests sleep ;—and there must lie,
Like baleful spirits barr'd from realms of bliss ;
But singing airs, and gleams of light,
And birds of calm, all glancing bright,
Must hither in their gladness come—
—Where shall they find a fitter home
Than a night-scene fair as this ?

And when, her fairy voyage past,
The happy Ship is moor'd at last
In the loved haven of her Indian Isle,
How dear to you will be the beams
Of the silent Moon ! What touching dreams
Your musing hearts beguile !
Though haply then her radiance fall
On some low mansion's flowery wall,
Far up an inland vale,
Yet then the sheeted mast will tower,
Her shrouds all rustling like a shower,
And, melting as wild music's power,
Low pipe the sea-born gale.
Each star will speak the tenderest things,
And when the clouds expand their wings,
All parting like a fleet,
Your own beloved Ship, I ween,
Will foremost in the van be seen,
And, rising loud and sweet,
The sailor's joyful shouts be heard,
Such as the midnight silence stirr'd
When the wish'd-for breezes blew,
And, instant as the loud commands,
Sent upwards from a hundred hands
The broad sails rose unto the sky,
And from her slumbers suddenly
The Ship like lightning flew.

But list ! a low and moaning sound
At distance heard, like a spirit's song,
And now it reigns above, around, ,
As if it call'd the Ship along.
The Moon is sunk ; and a clouded grey
Declares that her course is run,
And like a God who brings the day,
Up mounts the glorious Sun.
Soon as his light has warm'd the seas,
From the parting cloud fresh blows the Breeze ;
And that is the spirit whose well-known song
Makes the vessel to sail in joy along.
No fears hath she ;—Her giant-form
O'er wrathful surge, through blackening storm,
Majestically calm would go
Mid the deep darkness white as snow !
But gently now the small waves glide
Like playful lambs o'er a mountain's side.
So stately her bearing, so proud her array,
The Main she will traverse for ever and aye.
Many ports will exult at the gleam of her mast !
—Hush ! hush ! thou vain dreamer ! this hour is her last.
Five hundred souls in one instant of dread
Are hurried o'er the deck ;
And fast the miserable Ship
Becomes a lifeless wreck.

Her keel hath struck on a hidden rock,
Her planks are torn asunder,
And down come her masts with a reeling shock,
And a hideous crash like thunder.
Her sails are dragged in the brine
That gladden'd late the skies,
And her pendant that kiss'd the fair moonshine
Down many a fathom lies.
Her beauteous sides, whose rainbow hues
Glean'd softly from below,
And flung a warm and sunny flush
O'er the wreaths of murmuring snow,
To the coral rocks are hurrying down
To sleep amid colours as bright as their own.

Oh ! many a dream was in the Ship
An hour before her death ;
And sights of home with sighs disturb'd
The sleepers' long-drawn breath.
Instead of the murmur of the sea
The sailor heard the humming tree
Alive through all its leaves,
The hum of the spreading sycamore
That grows before his cottage-door,
And the swallow's song in the eaves.

His arms inclosed a blooming boy,
Who listen'd with tears of sorrow and joy
To the dangers his father had pass'd ;
And his wife—by turns she wept and smiled,
As she look'd on the father of her child
Return'd to her heart at last.
—He wakes at the vessel's sudden roll,
And the rush of waters is in his soul.
Astounded the reeling deck he paces,
Mid hurrying forms and ghastly faces ;—
The whole Ship's crew are there !
Wailings around and overhead,
Brave spirits stupified or dead,
And madness and despair.

Leave not the wreck, thou cruel Boat,
While yet 'tis thine to save,
And angel-hands will bid thee float
Uninjured o'er the wave,
Though whirlpools yawn across thy way,
And storms, impatient for their prey,
Around thee fiercely rave !
Vain all the prayers of pleading eyes,
Of outcry loud, and humble sighs,
Hands clasp'd, or wildly toss'd on high
To bless or curse in agony !

Despair and resignation vain !
Away like a strong-wing'd bird she flies,
That heeds not human miseries,
And far off in the sunshine dies
Like a wave of the restless main.
Hush ! hush ! Ye wretches left behind !
Silence becomes the brave, resign'd
To unexpected doom.
How quiet the once noisy crowd !
The sails now serve them for a shroud,
And the sea-cave is their tomb.
And where is that loveliest Being gone ?
Hope not that she is saved alone,
Immortal though such beauty seem'd to be.
She, and the Youth that loved her too,
Went down with the ship and her gallant crew—
No favourites hath the sea.

Now is the Ocean's bosom bare,
Unbroken as the floating air ;
The Ship hath melted quite away,
Like a struggling dream at break of day.
No image meets my wandering eye
But the new-risen sun, and the sunny sky.
Though the night-shades are gone, yet a vapour dull
Bedims the waves so beautiful ;

While a low and melancholy moan
Mourns for the glory that hath flown.
Oh ! that the wild and wailing strain
Were a dream that murmurs in my brain !
What happiness would then be mine,
When my eyes, as they felt the morning shine,
Instead of the unfathom'd Ocean-grave
Should behold Winander's peaceful wave,
And the Isles that love her loving breast,
Each brooding like a Halcyon's nest.
It may not be :—too well I know
The real doom from fancied woe,
The black and dismal hue.
Yea, many a visage wan and pale
Will hang at midnight o'er my tale,
And weep that it is true.

THE
ISLE OF PALMS.

CANTO SECOND.

THE
ISLE OF PALMS.

CANTO SECOND.

O HEAVENLY QUEEN ! by Mariners beloved !
Refulgent Moon ! when in the cruel sea
Down sank yon fair Ship to her coral grave,
Where didst thou linger then ? Sure it behoved
A Spirit strong and pitiful like thee
At that dread hour thy worshippers to save ;
Nor let the Glory where thy tenderest light,
Forsaking even the clouds, with pleasure lay,
Pass, like a cloud which none deplores, away,
No more to bless the empire of the Night.
How oft to thee have home-sick sailors pour'd
Upon their midnight-watch, no longer dull
When thou didst smile, hymns wild and beautiful,
Worthy the radiant Angel they adored !

And are such hymnings breathed to thee in vain ?
Gleam'st thou, as if delighted with the strain,
And won by it the pious bark to keep
In joy for ever ?—till at once behind
A cloud thou sailest,—and a roaring wind
Hath sunk her in the deep !
Or, though the zephyr scarcely blow,
Down to the bottom must she go
With all who wake or sleep,
Ere the slumberer from his dream can start,
Or the hymn hath left the singer's heart !
Oh ! sure, if ever mortal prayer
Were heard where thou and thy bright stars abide,
So many gallant spirits had not died
Thus mournfully in beauty and in prime !
But from the sky had shone an arm sublime,
To bless the worship of that Virgin fair,
And, only seen by Faith's uplifted eye,
The wretched vessel gently drifted by
The fatal rock, and to the crowded shore,
In triumph and in pride the expected glory bore.

Oh vain belief ! most beauteous as thou art,
Thy heavenly visage hides a cruel heart.
When Death and Danger, Terror and Dismay,
Are madly struggling on the dismal Ocean,

With heedless smile and calm unalter'd motion,
Onward thou glidest through the milky way,
Nor, in thy own immortal beauty blest,
Hear'st dying mortals rave themselves to rest.
Yet when this night thou mount'st thy starry throne,
Brightening to sun-like glory in thy bliss,
Wilt thou not then thy once-loved Vessel miss,
And wish her happy, now that she is gone ?
—Was that wild sound a human cry,
The voice of one more loath to die
Than they who round him sleep ?
Or of a Spirit in the sky,
A Demon in the deep ?
No sea-bird, through the darkness sailing,
E'er utter'd such a doleful wailing,
Foreboding the near blast :
If from a living thing it came,
It sure must have a spectral frame,
And soon its soul must part :—
That groan broke from a bursting heart,
The bitterest and the last.

The Figure moves ! It is alive !
None but its wretched self survive,
Yea ! drown'd are all the crew !

Ghosts are they underneath the wave,
And he, whom Ocean deign'd to save,
Stands there most ghost-like too. .
Alone upon a rock he stands
Amid the waves, and wrings his hands,
And lifts to Heaven his steadfast eye,
With a wild upbraiding agony.
He sends his soul through the lonesome air
To God : but God hears not his prayer ;
For, soon as his words from the wretch depart,
Cold they return on his baffled heart.
He flings himself down on his rocky tomb,
And madly laughs at his horrible doom.
With smiles the Main is overspread,
As if in mockery of the dead ;
And upward when he turns his sight, .
The unfeeling Sun is shining bright,
And strikes him with a sickening light.
While a fainting-fit his soul bedims,
He thinks that a Ship before him swims,
A gallant Ship, all fill'd with gales,
One radiant gleam of snowy sails—
His senses return, and he looks in vain
O'er the empty silence of the Main !
No Ship is there, with radiant gleam,
Whose shadow sail'd throughout his dream :

Not even one rueful plank is seen
To tell that a vessel hath ever been
Beneath these lonely skies :
But sea-birds he oft had seen before
Following the ship in hush or roar,
The loss of their resting-mast deplore
With wild and dreary cries.

What brought him here he cannot tell ;
Doubt and confusion darken all his soul,
While glimmering truth more dreadful makes the gloom :
Why hath the Ocean that black hideous swell ?
And in his ears why doth that dismal toll
For ever sound,—as if a city bell
Wail'd for a funeral passing to the tomb ?
Some one hath ^{just} died, and buried is this day ;
A hoary-headed man, or stripling gay,
Or haply some sweet maid, who was a bride,
And, ere her head upon his bosom lay
Who deem'd her all his own,—the Virgin died !
Why starts the wilder'd dreamer at the sound,
And casts his haggard eyes around ?
The utter agony hath seized him now,
For Memory drives him, like a slave, to know
What Madness would conceal :—His own dear Maid,
She, who he thought could never die, is dead.

“ Drown’d !”—still the breaking billows mutter,—
“ drown’d !”

With anguish loud was her death-bed !
Nor e’er,—wild wish of utmost woe !
Shall her fair corse be found.
Oft had he sworn with faithless breath,
That his love for the Maid was strong as death,
By the holy Sun he sware ;
The Sun upon the Ocean smiles,
And, with a sudden gleam, reviles
His vows as light as air.
Yet soon he flings, with a sudden start,
That gnawing frenzy from his heart,
For long in sooth he strove,
When the waters were booming in his brain,
And his life was clogg’d with a sickening pain,
To save his lady-love.

How long it seems since that dear night,
When gazing on the wan moonlight
He and his own betrothed stood,
Nor fear’d the harmless ocean-flood !
He feels as if many and many a day,
Since that bright hour, had pass’d away ;
The dim remembrance of some joy
In which he revell’d when a boy.

The crew's dumb misery and his own,
When lingeringly the ship went down,
Even like some mournful tale appears,
By wandering sailor told in other years.
Yet still he knows that this is all delusion,
For how could he for months and years have lain
A wretched thing upon the cruel Main,
Calm though it seem to be ? Would gracious Heaven
Set free his spirit from this dread confusion,
Oh, how devoutly would his thanks be given
To Jesus ere he died ! But tortured so,
He dare not pray beneath his weight of woe,
Lest he should feel, when about to die,
By God deserted utterly,
He cannot die ; Though he longs for death,
Stronger and stronger grows his breath,
And hopeless woe the spring of being feeds ;
He faints not, though his knell seems rung,
But lives, as if to life he clung,
And stronger as he bleeds.
But the weariness of wasting grief
Hath brought at last its own relief :
Each sense is dull'd ! He lies at last
As if the parting shock were past.
He sleeps !—Prolong his haunted rest,
O God !—for now the wretch is blest.

A fair romantic Island, crown'd
With a glow of blossom'd trees,
And underneath bestrewn with flowers,
The happy dreamer sees.

A stream comes dancing from a mount,
Down its fresh and lustrous side,
Then, tamed into a quiet pool,
Is scarcely seen to glide.

Like fairy sprites, a thousand birds
Glance by on golden wing,
Birds lovelier than the lovely hues
Of the bloom wherein they sing.

Upward he lifts his wondering eyes,
Nor yet believes that even the skies
So passing fair can be ;

And lo ! yon gleam of emerald light,
For human gaze too dazzling bright,
Is that indeed the Sea ?

Adorn'd with all her pomp and pride,
Long fluttering flags, and pendants wide,
He sees a stately vessel ride
At anchor in a bay,
Where never waves by storm were driven,
Shaped like the Moon when she is young in heaven,
Or melting in a cloud that stops her way.

Her masts tower nobly from the rocking deep,
Tall as the palm trees on the steep,
And, burning mid their crests so darkly green,
Her meteor-glories all abroad are seen,
Wakening the forests from their solemn sleep ;
While suddenly the cannon's sound
Rolls through the cavern'd glens, and groves profound,
And never-dying echoes roar around.
Shaded with branching palm, the sign of peace,
Canoes and skiffs like lightning shoot along,
Countless as waves there sporting on the seas ;
While still from those that lead the van, a song,
Whose chorus rends the inland cliffs afar,
Tells that advance before that unarm'd throng,
Princes and chieftains, with a fearless smile,
And outstretch'd arms, to welcome to their Isle
That gallant Ship of War.
And glad are they who therein sail,
Once more to breathe the balmy gale,
'To kiss the steadfast strand :
They round the world are voyaging,
And who can tell their suffering
Since last they saw the land ?

But that bright pageant will not stay :
Palms, plumes, and ensigns melt away,

Island, and ship !—Though utter be the change
(For on a rock he seems to lie
All naked to the burning sky)
He doth not think it strange.
While in his memory faint recallings swim,
He fain would think it is a dream
That thus distracts his view,
Until some unimagined pain
Shoots shivering through his troubled brain ;
—Though dreadful, all is true.
But what to him is anguish now,
Though it burn in his blood, and his heart, and his
brow,
For ever from morn to night ?
For lo ! an Angel shape descends,
As soft and silent as moonlight,
And o'er the dreamer bends.
She cannot be an earthly child,
Yet, when the Vision sweetly smiled,
The light that there did play
Reminded him, he knew not why,
Of one beloved in infancy,
But now far, far away.

Disturb'd by fluttering joy, he wakes.
And feels a death-like shock ;

For, harder even than in his dream,
His bed is a lonely rock.
Poor wretch ! he dares not open his eye,
For he dreads the beauty of the sky,
And the useless unavailing breeze
That he hears upon the happy seas.
A voice glides sweetly through his heart,
The voice of one that mourns ;
Yet it hath a gladsome melody—
Dear God ! the dream returns !
A gentle kiss breathes o'er his cheek,
A kiss of murmuring sighs,
It wanders o'er his brow, and falls
Like light upon his eyes.
Through that long kiss he dimly sees,
All bathed in smiles and tears,
A well-known face ; and from those lips
A well-known voice he hears.
With a doubtful look he scans the Maid,
As if half-delighted, half-afraid,
Then bows his wilder'd head,
And, with deep groans, he strives to pray
That Heaven would drive the fiend away,
That haunts his dying bed.
Again he dares to view the air :
The beauteous ghost yet lingers there,

Veil'd in a spotless shroud :
Breathing in tones subdued and low,
Bent o'er him like Heaven's radiant bow,
And still as evening-cloud.

“ Art thou a phantom of the brain ?”
He cries, “ a mermaid from the main ?
A seraph from the sky ?
Or art thou a fiend with a seraph's smile,
Come here to mock on this horrid Isle,
My dying agony ?” —
Had he but seen what touching sadness fell
On that fair creature's cheek while thus he spoke,
Had heard the stifled sigh that slowly broke
From her untainted bosom's lab'ring swell,
He scarce had hoped, that at the throne of grace
Such cruel words could e'er have been forgiven,
The impious sin of doubting such a face,
Of speaking thus of Heaven.
Weeping, she wrings his dripping hair
That hangs across his cheek ;
And leaves a hundred kisses there,
But not one word can speak.
In bliss she listens to his breath :
Ne'er murmur'd so the breast of death !
Alas ! sweet one ! what joy can give

Fond-cherish'd thoughts like these !
For how mayest thou and thy lover live
In the centre of the seas ?
Or vainly to your sorrows seek for rest,
On a rock where never verdure grew,
Too wild even for the wild sea-mew
To build her slender nest !

Sublime is the faith of a lonely soul,
In pain and trouble cherish'd ;
Sublime the spirit of hope that lives,
When earthly hope has perish'd.
And where doth that blest faith abide ?
O ! not in Man's stern nature : human pride
Inhabits there, and oft by virtue led,
Pride though it be, it doth a glory shed,
That makes the world we mortal beings tread,
In chosen spots, resplendent as the Heaven !
But to yon gentle Maiden turn,
Who never for herself doth mourn,
And own that faith's undying urn
Is but to woman given.
Now that the shade of sorrow falls
Across her life, and duty calls,
Her spirit burns with a fervent glow,
And stately through the gloom of woe

Behold her alter'd form arise,
Like a priestess at a sacrifice.
The touch of earth hath left no taint
Of weakness in the fearless saint.
Like clouds, all human passions roll,
At the breath of devotion, from her soul,
And God looks down with a gleam of grace,
On the stillness of her heavenward face,
Just paler in her grief.
While, hark ! like one who God adores,
Such words she o'er her lover pours,
As give herself relief.

“ Oh ! look again on her who speaks
To thee, and bathes thy sallow cheeks
With many a human tear !
No cruel thing beside thee leans,
Thou knowest what thy Mary means,
Thy own true love is here.
Open thine eyes ! thy beauteous eyes !
For mercy smile on me !
Speak !—but one word ! one little word !
'Tis all I ask of thee.
If these eyes would give one transient gleam,
To cheer this dark and dreadful dream,

If, while I kiss thy cheek,
These dear, dear lips, alas ! so pale,
Before their parting spirit fail,
One low farewell would speak,—
This rock so hard would be a bed
Of down unto thy Mary's head,
And gently would we glide away,
Fitz-Owen ! to that purer day
Of which thou once didst sing ;
Like birds, that, rising from the foam,
Seek on some lofty cliff their home,
On storm-despising wing.
Yes ! that thou hear'st thy Mary's voice,
That lovely smile declares !
Here let us in each other's arms
Dissolve our life in prayers.
I see in that uplifted eye,
That thou art not afraid to die ;
For ever brave wert thou.
Oh ! press me closer to thy soul,
And, while yet we hear the Ocean roll,
Breathe deep the marriage vow !
We hoped far other days to see ;
But the will of God be done !
My husband ! behold yon pile of clouds
Like a city, round the Sun :

Beyond these clouds, ere the phantoms part,
Thou wilt lean in bliss on my loving heart."—

Sweet seraph ! lovely was thy form,
When, shrouded in the misty storm
That swept o'er Snowdon's side,
The Cambrian shepherd, through the gloom,
Like a spirit rising from the tomb,
With awe beheld thee glide ;
And lovely wert thou, Child of Light !
When, gazing on the starry night
Within Llanberris Lake,
Thy spirit felt, in a hush like death,
The fading earth's last whisper'd breath
The holy scene forsake.
Oh ! lovelier still, when thy noiseless tread
Around thy aged mother's bed
Fell soft as snow on snow,
When thy yearning heart repress'd its sighs,
And from thy never-closing eyes
Forbade the tears to flow.
But now unto thy looks are given
The beauty and the power of Heaven :
The sternness of this dismal Isle
Is soften'd by thy saintly smile.

And he, who lay like a madman, bound
In fetters of anguish to the ground,
And heard and saw, in fearful strife,
The sounds and the sights of unearthly life,
Now opens his eyes that glisten mild
Like the gladsome eyes of a waken'd child,
For the hideous trance is fled ;
And his soul is fill'd with the glory bright,
That plays like a wreath of halo-light
Around his Mary's head.

Most awful is the perfect rest
That sits within her eye,
Awful her pallid face imprest
With the seal of victory.
Triumphant o'er the ghastly dreams
That haunt the parting soul,
She looks like a bird of calm, that floats
Unmoved when thunders roll,
And gives to the storm as gentle notes
As e'er through sunshine stole.
Her lover leans on her quiet breast,
And his heart like hers is still :
Ne'er martyr'd saints more meekly bow'd
To their Creator's will.
As calm they sit, as they had steer'd

To some little favourite Isle,
To mark upon the peaceful waves
The parting sunbeams smile ;
As if the lightly feather'd oar
In an hour could take them to the shore,
Where friends and parents dwell :
But far, alas ! from such shore are they,
And of friends, who for their safety pray,
Have ta'en a last farewell.

But why thus gleams Fitz-Owen's eye ?
Why bursts his eager speech ?
Lo ! as if brought by angel hands
Uninjur'd on the beach,
With oars and sails a vessel lies :
Salvation from the gracious skies !
He fears it is a dream ; that woe
Hath surely crazed his brain :
He drives the phantom from his gaze,
But the boat appears again.
It is the same that used to glide
When the wind had fallen low,
Like a child along its parent's side,
Around the guardian prow
Of the mighty ship whose shadow lay
Unmoved upon the watery way.

In the madness of that dismal hour,
When the shrieking Ship went down,
This little boat to the rocky Isle
Hath drifted all alone.

And there she lies ! the oars are laid
As by the hand of pleasure,
Preparing on the quiet tide
To beat a gladsome measure.
The dripping sail is careless tied
Around the painted mast,
And a gaudy flag with purple glows,
Hung up in sportive joy by those
Whose sports and joys are past.

So lightly doth this little boat
Upon the scarce-touch'd billows float,
So careless doth she seem to be
Thus left by herself on the homeless sea,
That, while the happy lovers gaze
On her, the hope of happier days
Steals unawares, like Heaven's own breath
O'er souls that were prepared for death.
They gaze on her, till she appears
As if she understood their tears ;
To lay there with her cheerful sail
Till Heaven should send some gracious gale,

Some gentle spirit of the deep,
With motion soft and swift as sleep,
To waft them to some pleasant cave
In the unknown gardens of the wave,
That, hid from every human eye,
Are happy in the smiling sky,
And in their beauty win the love
Of every orb that shines above.
Fitz-Owen from his dream awakes,
And gently in his arms he takes
His gentle Maid, as a shepherd kind
Brings from the killing mountain wind
A snow-white lamb, and lets it rest
In sleep and beauty on his breast.
And now the gentle fearless Maid
Within the boat in peace is laid :
Her limbs recline as if in sleep,
Though almost resting on the deep ;
On his dear bosom leans her head,
And through her long hair, wildly spread
O'er all her face, her melting eyes
Are lifted upwards to the skies,
In silent prayer that Heaven would save
The arms that fold her from the grave.

The boat hath left the lonesome rock,
And tries the wave again.

And on she glides without a fear,
So beauteous is the main.
Her little sail beneath the sun
Gleams radiant as the snow,
And o'er the gently-heaving swell
Bounds like a mountain-roe.
In that frail bark the lovers sit,
With steadfast face and silent breath,
Following the guiding hope of life,
Yet reconciled to death.
His arm is round her tender side,
That moves beneath the press,
With a mingled beat of solemn awe
And virgin tenderness.
They speak not :—but the inward flow
Of faith and dread, and joy and woe,
Each from the other hears :
Long, long they gaze with meeting eyes,
Then lift them slowly to the skies
Steep'd in imploring tears.
And ever, as the rock recedes,
They feel their spirits rise ;
And half forget that the smiling sea
Caused all their miseries.
Yet safe to them is the trackless brine
As some well-known and rural road

Paced in their childhood ;—for they love
Each other, and believe in God.

And well might the refulgent day
These Ocean Pilgrims cheer,
And make them feel as if the glades
Of home itself were near.
For a living sentiment of joy,
Such as doth sleep on hill and vale
When the friendly sun comes from his clouds
The vernal bloom to hail,
Plays on the Ocean's sparkling breast,
That, half in motion, half at rest,
Like a happy thing doth lie ;
Breathing that fresh and fragrant air,
And seeming in that slumber fair
The Brother of the Sky.
Hues brighter than the ruby-stone
With radiance gem his wavy zone,
A million hues, I ween :
Long dazzling lines of snowy white,
Fantastic wreath'd with purple light,
Or bathed in richest green.
The flying fish, on wings of gold,
Skims through the sunny ray,
Then, like the rainbow's dying gleam,
In the clear wave melts away.

And all the beauteous joy seems made
For that dauntless Youth and sainted Maid,
Whom God and Angels love :
Comfort is in the helm, the sail,
The light, the clouds, the sea, the gale,
Around, below, above.

And thus they sail, and sail along,
Without one thought of fear ;
As calm as if the boatman's song
Awoke an echoing cheer,
O'er the hills that stretch in sylvan pride
On the Bala Lake's romantic side.
And lo ! beneath the mellowing light,
That trembles between day and night
Before the Sun's decline,
As to the touch of fairy-hand
Upstarting dim the nameless land
Extends its mountain line.
It is no cloud that steadfast lies
Between the Ocean and the Skies ;
No image of a cloud, that flings
Across the deep its shadowy wings ;
Such as oft cheats with visions fair
The heart of home-sick mariner.

It is the living Earth ! They see
From the shore a smile of amity
That gently draws them on, •
Such a smile as o'er all Nature glows
At a summer evening's fragrant close,
When the winds and rain are gone.
The self-moved boat appears to seek
With gladsome glide a home-like creek,
In the centre of a bay,
Which the calm and quiet hills surround,
And touch'd by waves without a sound,
Almost as calm as they.

And, what if here fierce savage men
Glare on them from some darksome den ?—
What would become of this most helpless Maid ?
Fitz-Owen thinks :—but in her eye
So calmly bright, he can descry
That she is not afraid
Of savage men or monsters wild,
But is sublimely reconciled,
To meet and bear her destiny.
A gentle rippling on the sand—
One stroke of the dexterous oar—
The sail is furl'd : the boat is moor'd :
And the Lovers walk the shore.

To them it is an awful thought,
From the wild world of waters brought
By God's protecting hand,
When every Christian soul was lost,
On that unknown, but beauteous coast,
As in a dream to stand.
While their spirits with devotion burn,
Their faces to the sea they turn,
That lately seem'd their grave ;
And bless, in murmurs soft and low,
The beautiful, the halcyon glow,
That bathes the evening wave.
Before the setting sun they kneel,
And through the silent air,
To Him that dwells on that throne of light
They pour their souls in prayer.
Their thoughts are floating, like the clouds
That seek the beauteous West,
Their gentleness, their peace the same,
The same their home of rest.
Now Night hath come with the cooling breeze,
And these Lovers still are on their knees.

THE

ISLE OF PALMS.

CANTO THIRD.

THE
ISLE OF PALMS.

CANTO THIRD.

OH many are the beauteous isles
Unknown to human eye,
That, sleeping 'mid the Ocean smiles,
In happy silence lie.
The Ship may pass them in the night,
Nor the sailors know what a lovely sight
Is resting on the Main ;
Some wandering Ship who hath lost her way,
And never, or by night or day,
Shall pass these isles again.
There, groves that bloom in endless spring
Are rustling to the radiant wing
Of birds, in various plumage bright,
As rainbow-hues, or dawning light.
Soft-falling showers of blossoms fair,
Float ever on the fragrant air,

Like showers of vernal snow,
And from the fruit-tree, spreading tall,
The richly ripen'd clusters fall
Oft as sea-breezes blow.
The sun and clouds alone possess
The joy of all that loveliness ;
And sweetly to each other smile
The live-long day—sun, cloud, and isle.
How silent lies each shelter'd bay !
No other visitors have they
To their shores of silvery sand,
Than the waves that, murmuring in their glee,
All hurrying in a joyful band
Come dancing from the sea.

How did I love to sigh and weep
For those that sail'd upon the deep,
When, yet a wondering child,
I sat alone at dead of night,
Hanging all breathless with delight
O'er their adventures wild !
Trembling I heard of dizzy shrouds,
Where up among the raving clouds
The sailor-boy must go ;
Thunder and lightning o'er his head !

And, should he fall—O thought of dread !
Waves mountain-high below.
How leapt my heart with wildering fears,
Gazing on savage islanders
Ranged fierce in long canoe,
Their poison'd spears, their war-attire,
And plumes twined bright, like wreaths of fire,
Round brows of dusky hue !
What tears would fill my wakeful eyes
When some delicious paradise,
(As if a cloud had roll'd
On a sudden from the bursting sun,)
Freshening the Ocean where it shone,
Flung wide its groves of gold !
No more the pining Mariner
In wild delirium raves,
For like an angel, kind and fair,
That smiles, and smiling saves,
The glory charms away distress,
Serene in silent loveliness
Amid the dash of waves.

And would'st thou think it hard to dwell
Alone within some sylvan cell,
Some fragrant arch of flowers,

Raised like a queen with gracious smile
In the midst of this her subject isle,
This labyrinth of bowers ?
Could the fair earth, and fairer skies,
Clouds, breezes, fountains, groves,
To banish from thy heart suffice
All thought of deeper loves ?
Or would'st thou pine thy life away,
To kiss once more the blessed ray
That shines in human eyes ?
What though the clustering roses came
Like restless gleams of magic flame,
As if they loved thy feet,
To win thee like a summer sprite,
With purest touches of delight,
To the Fairy Queen's retreat !
Oh ! they would bloom and wither too,
And melt their pearls of radiant dew,
Without one look from thee :
What pleasure could that beauty give,
Which, of all mortal things that live,
None but thyself may see ?
And where are the birds that cheer'd thine eyes,
With wings and crests of rainbow dyes,
That wont for aye to glide

Like sunbeams through the shady bowers,
Charming away the happy hours
With songs of love or pride ?
Soon, soon thou hatest this Paradise ;
It seems the soul hath fled
That made it fairer than the skies,
And a joyful beauty shed
O'er the tremor of the circling wave,
That now with restless moans and sighs
Sounds like the dirge-song of the dead,
Dim breaking round a grave.

But she thou lovest is at thy side,
The Island Queen becomes thy bride,
And God and Nature sanctify the vow ;
Air, Earth, and Ocean smile once more,
And along the forest-fringed shore,
What mirth and music now !
What warm and heavenly tints illumine
The land that lately seem'd a tomb
Where thou wert left to die !
So bathed in joy this earth appears
To him, who, blind for lingering years,
At last beholds the sky.
Thy heart was like an untouch'd lyre,
Silent as death—Let the trembling wire

The hand that knows its spirit feel ;
And list ! What melting murmurs steal
Like incense to the realms above,
Such sounds as parted souls might love.
And now if a home-bound vessel lay
At anchor in yon beauteous bay,
'Till the land-breeze her canvas wings should swell,
From the sweet Isle thou scarce would'st part,
But, when thou didst, thy lingering heart
Would sadly say, " Farewell !"

In such a fairy Isle now pray'd
Fitz-Owen and his darling Maid.
The setting sun, with a pensive glow,
Had bathed their foreheads bending low,
Nor ceased the voice, or the breath of their prayer,
Till the moonlight lay on the mellow'd air.
Then from the leaves they calmly rose,
As after a night of calm repose,
And Mary lean'd her face
With a sob of joy on her Lover's breast,
Who with kind tones the Maiden press'd
In a holy pure embrace.
And gently he kiss'd her tearful eyes,
And bade her heart lie still,
For there was a power in the gracious skies

To shield their saints from ill.
Then, guided by the moon-light pale,
They walk'd into a sylvan vale,
Soft, silent, warm, and deep ;
And there beneath her languid head,
The silken wither'd leaves he spread,
That she might sweetly sleep.
Then down he sat by her tender side,
And, as she lay, with soft touch dried
The stealing tears she could not hide ;
Till sleep, like a faint shadow, fell
O'er the husht face he loved so well,
And smiling dreams were given
To cheer her heart ; then down he laid
His limbs beside the sleeping Maid,
In the face of the starry Heaven.

Sleep fell upon their wearied souls
With a power as deep as death ;
Scarce trembled Mary's floating hair
In her Lover's tranquil breath.
In that still trance did dear thoughts come
From the brook, and the glade, and the sky, of home,
And the gentle sound of her mother's voice
Bade Mary's slumbering soul rejoice.

For she in dreams to Wales hath flown,
And sits in a cottage of her own,
Beneath its sheltering tree :
Fitz-Owen's eye is fix'd on hers,
While with a timid smile she stirs
Beside her mother's knee.
But the rising sun hath pour'd his beams
Into her heart, and broke her dreams ;
Slowly she lifts her eyes,
And, wondering at the change, looks round,
Upon that wild enchanted ground,
And these delightful skies.
Over her Lover's breast she breathes
A blessing and a prayer,
And gently they stir his sleeping soul,
Like the voice of the morning-air.
Soon as the first surprise is past,
They rise from their leafy bed,
As cheerful as the new-woke birds
That sing above their head.
And trusting in the merciful Power
That saved them in that dismal hour
When the ship sank in the sea,
Cheering their souls with many a smile
They walk through the woods of this ~~lonely~~ Isle
In undisturb'd tranquillity.

Well might they deem that wizard's wand
Had set them down in Fairy-land,
Or that their souls some beauteous dream obey'd :
They know not where to look or listen,
For pools and streams of crystal glisten
Above, around,—embracing like the air
The soft-reflected trees ; while everywhere
From shady nook, clear hill, and sunny glade,
The ever-varying soul of music play'd ;
As if, at some capricious thing's command,
Indulging every momentary mood,
With voice and instrument, a fairy band
Beneath some echoing precipice now stood,
Now on steep mountain's rocky battlement,
Or from the clouds their blended chorus sent,
With jocund din to mock the solitude.
They gaze with never-sated eyes
On lengthening lines of flowery dyes,
That through the woods, and up the mountains run :
Not richer radiance robes the Even,
When she ascends her throne in Heaven,
Beside the setting sun.
Scattering the blossomy gems away,
Like the white shower of the Ocean spray,
Across their path for ever glide or shoot
Birds of such beauty, as might lead

The soul to think that magic power decreed
Spirits to dwell therein ; nor are they mute,
But each doth chant his own beloved strain,
For ever trembling on a natural tune,
The heart's emotions seeming so to suit,
That the rapt Lovers are desiring soon,
That silence never may return again.

A cheerful welcome these bright creatures sing ;
And as the Lovers roam from glade to glade,
That shine with sunlight, and with music ring,
Seems but for them the enchanted island made.
So strong the influence of the fairy scene,
That soon they feel as if for many a year
In love and rapture they had linger'd here,
While with the beauteous things that once have been
Long, long ago, or only in the mind
By Fancy imaged, lies their native Wales,
Its dim seen hills, and all its streamy vales :
Sounds in their souls its rushing mountain wind,
Like music heard in youth, remember'd well,
But when or where it rose they cannot tell.
Delightful woods, and many a cloudless sky,
Are in their memory strangely floating by,
But the faint pageant slowly melts away
And to the living earth they yield

Their willing hearts, as if reveal'd
In all its glory on this mystic day.
Like fire, strange flowers around them flame,
Sweet, harmless fire, breathed from some magic urn,
The silky gossamer that may not burn,
Too wildly beautiful to bear a name.
And when the Ocean sends a breeze,
To wake the music sleeping in the trees,
Trees scarce they seem to be ; for many a flower,
Radiant as dew, or ruby polish'd bright,
Glances on every spray, that bending light
Around the stem, in variegated bows,
Appear like some awaken'd fountain-shower,
That with the colour of the evening glows.

And towering o'er these beauteous woods,
Gigantic rocks were ever dimly seen,
Breaking with solemn grey the tremulous green,
And frowning far in castellated pride ;
While, hastening to the Ocean, hoary floods
Sent up a thin and radiant mist between,
Softening the beauty that it could not hide.
Lo ! higher still the stately Palm-trees rise,
Chequering the clouds with their unbending stems,
And o'er the clouds amid the dark-blue skies,
Lifting their rich unfading diadems.

How calm and placidly they rest
Upon the Heavens' indulgent breast,
As if their branches never breeze had known !
Light bathes them aye in glancing showers,
And Silence mid their lofty bowers
Sits on her moveless throne.
Entranced there the Lovers gaze,
Till every human fear decays,
And bliss steals slowly through their quiet souls ;
Though ever lost to human kind
And all they love, they are resign'd :
While with a scarce-heard murmur rolls,
Like the waves that break along the shore,
The sound of the world they must see no more.
List ! Mary is the first to speak,
Her tender voice still tenderer in her bliss ;
And breathing o'er her silent husband's cheek,
As from an infant's lip, a timid kiss,
Whose touch at once all lingering sorrow calms,
Says, " God to me in love hath given
A home on earth, most like to Heaven,
Our own sweet ISLE OF PALMS." —

And where shall these happy lovers dwell ?
Shall they seek in the cliffs for some mossy cell ?
Some wilder haunt than ever hermit knew ?

Where they may shun the mid-day heat,
And slumber in a safe retreat,
When evening sheds her dew ;
Or shall they build a leafy nest,
Where they like birds may sport and rest,
By clustering bloom preserved from sun and rain,
Upon some little radiant mound
Within reach of the freshening sound
That murmurs from the Main ?
No farther need their footsteps roam :
Even where they stand, a sylvan home
Steals like a thought upon their startled sight ,
For Nature's breath with playful power
Hath framed an undecaying bower,
With colours heavenly bright.
Beyond a green and level lawn,
Its porch and roof of roses dawn
Through arching trees that lend a mellowing shade.
How gleams the bower with countless eyes !
Unwearied spring fresh bloom supplies,
Still brightening where they fade.
Two noble Palms, the forest's pride
Guarding the bower on either side,
Their straight majestic stems to Heaven uprear :
There Beauty sleeps in Grandeur's arms,
And sheltered there from all alarms,
Hath nought on earth to fear.

The Dwellers in that lovely bower,
If mortal shape may breathe such blessed air,
Might gaze on it from morn till evening-hour,
Nor wish for other sight more touching fair.
Why look abroad? All things are here
Delightful to the eye and ear,
And fragrance pure as light floats all around.
But if they look—those mystic gleams,
The glory we adore in dreams,
May here in truth be found.
Fronting the bower, eternal woods,
Darkening the mountain solitudes,
With awe the soul oppress :
There dwells, with shadowy glories crown'd,
Rejoicing in the gloom profound,
The Spirit of the Wilderness.
Lo ! stretching inward on the right,
A winding vale eludes the sight,
But where it lies the happy soul must dream :
Oh ! never sure beneath the sun,
Along such lovely banks did run
So musical a stream.
But who shall dare in thought to paint
Yon fairy waterfall ?
Still moisten'd by the misty showers,
From fiery-red, to yellow soft and faint,

Fantastic bands of fearless flowers
Sport o'er the rocky wall ;
And ever, through the shrouding spray,
Whose diamonds glance as bright as they,
Float birds of graceful form, and gorgeous plumes,
Or dazzling white as snow ;
While, as the passing sun illumines
The river's bed, in silent pride
Spanning the cataract roaring wide,
Unnumber'd rainbows glow.

But turn around, if thou hast power
To leave a scene so fair,
And looking left-wards from the bower,
What glory meets thee there !
For lo ! the heaven-encircled Sea
Outspreads his dazzling pageantry,
As if the whole creation were his own,
And the Isle, on which thy feet now stand,
In beauty rose at his command,
And for his joy alone.
Beyond his billows rolling bright,
The Spirit dares not wing her flight ;
For where, upon the boundless deep,
Should she, if wearied, sink to sleep ?

Back to the beauteous Isle of Palms
Glad she returns ; there constant calms
The bays, that sleep like inland lakes, invest :
Delightful all ;—but to your eyes,
O blessed Pair ! one circlet lies
More fair than all the rest.
At evening, through that silent bay
With beating hearts ye steer'd your way,
Yet trusting in the guiding love of Heaven ;
And there, upon your bended knees,
To the unseen Pilot of the Seas
Your speechless prayers were given.
From your bower-porch the skiff behold
That to this Eden bore
Your almost hopeless souls :—how bold
It seems to lie, all danger o'er,
A speck amid the fluid gold
That burns along the shore !

Five cloudless days have, from the placid deep,
In glory risen o'er this refulgent Isle,
And still the Sun retired to rest too soon ;
And each night with more gracious smile,
Guarding the lovers when they sleep,
Hath watch'd the holy Moon.

Through many a dim and dazzling glade,
They in their restless joy have stray'd,
In many a grot reposed, and twilight cave ;
Have wander'd round each ocean bay,
And gazed where inland waters lay
Serene as night, and bright as day,
Untouch'd by wind or wave.
Happy their doom, though strange and wild,
And soon their souls are reconciled
For ever here to live, and here to die.
Why should they grieve ? a constant mirth
With music fills the air and earth,
And beautifies the sky.
High on the rocks the wild-flowers shine
In beauty bathed, and joy divine :
In their dark nooks to them are given
The sunshine and the dews of Heaven.
The fish that dart like silver gleams
Are happy in their rock-bound streams,
Happy as they that roam the Ocean's breast ;
Though far away on sounding wings
Yon bird could fly, content he sings
Around his secret nest.
And shall the Monarchs of this Isle
Lament, when one unclouded smile
Hangs like perpetual spring on every wood ?

And often in their listening souls
By a delightful awe subdued,
God's voice, like mellow thunder, rolls
All through the silent solitude.

Five days have fled !—The Sun again,
Like an angel, o'er the brightening *Matu*
Uplifts his radiant head ;
And full upon yon dewy bower,
The warm tints of the dawning hour
Mid warmer still are shed.
The Sun pours not his light in vain
On them who therein dwell :—a strain
Of pious music, through the morning calm
Wakening unwonted echoes, wildly rings,
And kneeling there to Mercy's fane,
While flowers supply their incense-balm,
At the foot of yon majestic Palm
The *Maid* her *matins* sings.
It is the Sabbath morn :—since last
From Heaven it shone, what awful things have past !
In their beloved vessel as it roll'd
In pride and beauty o'er the waves of gold,
Then were they sailing free from all alarms,
Rejoicing in her scarce-felt motion
When the ship flew, or slumbering Ocean
Detain'd her in his arms.

Beneath the sail's expanded shade,
They and the thoughtless crew together pray'd,
And sweet their voices rose above the wave ;
Nor seem'd it woeful as a strain
That never was to rise again,
And chanted o'er the grave.

Ne'er seem'd before the Isle so bright ;
And when their hymns were ended,
Oh ! ne'er in such intense delight
Had their rapt souls been blended.
Some natural tears they surely owed
To those who wept for them, and fast they flow'd,
And oft will flow amid their happiest hours ;
But not less fair the summer day,
Though glittering through the sunny ray
Are seen descending showers.
But how could Sorrow, Grief, or Pain,
The glory of that morn sustain ?
Alone amid the Wilderness
More touching seem'd the holiness
Of that mysterious day of soul-felt rest :
They are the first that e'er adored
On this wild spot their Heavenly Lord,
Or gentle Jesus bless'd.
“ O Son of God !—How sweetly came
Into their souls that blessed name !

Even like health's hope-reviving breath
To one upon the bed of death.
"Our Saviour!"—What angelic grace
Stole with dim smiles o'er Mary's face,
While through the solitude profound
With love and awe she breathed that holy sound!
Yes! He will save! a still small voice
To Mary's fervent prayer replied;
Beneath his tender care rejoice,
On earth who for his children died.
Her Lover saw that, while she pray'd,
Communion with her God was given
Unto her sinless spirit:—nought he said;
But gazing on her with a fearful love,
Such as saints feel for sister-souls above,
Her cheek upon his bosom gently laid,
And dreamt with her of Heaven.

Pure were their souls, as infant's breath,
Who in its cradle guiltless sinks in death.
No place for human frailty this,
Despondency or fears,
Too beautiful the wild appears
Almost for human bliss.
Was love like theirs then given in vain?
And must they, trembling, shrink from pure delight?

Or shall that God, who on the main
Hath bound them with a billowy chain,
Approve the holy rite,
That, by their pious souls alone
Perform'd before his silent throne
In innocence and joy,
Here, and in realms beyond the grave,
Unites those whom the cruel wave
Could not for grief destroy ?
No fears felt they of guilt or sin,
For sure they heard a voice within
That set their hearts at rest ;
They pass'd the day in peaceful prayer,
And when beneath the evening air,
They sought again their arbour fair,
A smiling angel met them there,
And bade their couch be blest.
Nor veil'd the Moon her virgin-light,
But, clear and cloudless all the night,
Hung o'er the flowers where love and beauty lay
And, loath to leave that holy bower,
With lingering pace obey'd the power
Of bright-returning day.

And say ! what wanteth now the Isle of Palms,
To make it happy as those Isles of rest
(When eve the sky becalms
Like a subsiding sea,)
That hang resplendent mid the gorgeous west,
All brightly imaged, mountain, grove, and tree,
The setting sun's last lingering pageantry !
Hath Fancy ever dreamt of seraph-Powers
Walking in beauty through these cloud-framed bowers,
Light as the mist that wraps their dazzling feet ?
And hath she ever paused to hear,
By moonlight brought unto her ear,
Their hymnings wild and sweet ?
Lo ! human creatures meet her view
As happy, and as beautiful too,
As those ærial phantoms !—in their mien,
Where'er they move, a graceful calm is seen
All foreign to this utter solitude,
Yet blended with such wild and fairy glide,
As erst in Grecian Isle had beautified
The guardian Deities of Grove and Flood.
Are these fair creatures earth-born and alive,
And mortal, like the flowers that round them smile ?
Or if into the Ocean sank their Isle
A thousand fathoms deep—would they survive,—

Like sudden rainbows spread their arching wings,
And while, to cheer their airy voyage, sings
With joy the charmed sea, the Heavens give way,
That in the spirits, who had sojourn'd long
On earth, might glide, then re-assume their sway,
And from the gratulating throng
Of kindred spirits, drink the inexpressive song?

Oh! fairer now these blessed Lovers seem,
Gliding like spirits through o'er-arching trees,
Their beauty mellowing in the chequer'd light,
Than, years ago, on that resplendent night,
When yielded up to an unearthly dream,
In their sweet ship they sail'd upon the seas.
Ay! years ago!—for in this temperate clime,
Fleet, passing fleet, the noiseless plumes of time
Float through the fragrance of the sunny air;
One little month seems scarcely gone,
Since in a vessel of their own
At eve they landed there.
Their bower is now a stately bower,
For, on its roof, the loftiest flower
To bloom so lowly grieves,
And up like an ambitious thing
That feareth nought, behold it spring
Till it meet the high Palm-leaves!

The porch is opening seen no more,
But folded up with blossoms hoar,
And leaves green as the sea,
And, when the wind hath found them out,
The merry waves that dancing rout
May not surpass in glee.
About their home so little art,
They seem to live in Nature's heart,
A sylvan court to hold
In a palace framed of lustre green,
More rare than to the bright Flower Queen
Was ever built of old.

Where are they in the hours of day ?
—The birds are happy on the spray,
The dolphins on the deep,
Whether they wanton full of life,
Or, wearied with their playful strife,
Amid the sunshine sleep.
And are these things by Nature blest
In sport, in labour, and in rest,—
And yet the Sovereigns of the Isle oppress
With languor or with pain ?
No ! with light glide, and cheerful song,
Through flowers and fruit they dance along,
And still fresh joys, uncall'd for, throng

Through their romantic reign.
The wild-deer bounds along the rock,
But let him not yon hunter mock,
Though strong, and fierce, and fleet ;
For he will trace his mountain-path,
Or else his antler's threatening wrath
In some dark winding meet.
Vaunt not, gay bird ! thy gorgeous plume,
Though on yon leafy tree it bloom
Like a flower both rich and fair :
Vain thy loud song and scarlet glow,
To save from his unerring bow ;
The arrow finds thee there.
Dark are the caverns of the wave,
Yet those, that sport there, cannot save,
Though hidden from the day,
With silvery sides bedropt with gold,
Struggling they on the beach are roll'd
O'er shells as bright as they.

Their pastimes these, and labours too,
From day to day unwearied they renew,
In garments floating with a woodland grace :
Oh ! lovelier far than fabled sprites,
They glide along through new delights,
Like Health and Beauty vying in the race.

Yet hours of soberer bliss they know,
Their spirits in more solemn flow
At day-fall oft will run
When from his throne, with kingly motion,
Into the loving arms of Ocean
Descends the setting Sun.
“ Oh ! beauteous are thy rocky vales,
Land of my birth, forsaken Wales !
Towering from continent or sea,
Where is the Mountain like to thee ?—
The eagle’s darling, and the tempest’s pride,—
Thou ! on whose ever-varying side
The shadows and the sun-beams glide
In still or stormy weather,
Oh Snowdon ! may I breathe thy name ?
And thine too, of gigantic frame,
Cader-Idris ? ’neath the solar flame,
Oh ! proud ye stand together !
And thou, sweet Lake ! ”—but from its wave
She turn’d her inward eye,
For near these banks, within her grave,
Her Mother sure must lie :
Weak were her limbs, long, long ago,
And grief, ere this, hath laid them low.

Yet soon Fitz-Owen's eye and voice
From these sad dreams recall
His weeping wife ; and deeply chear'd
She soon forgets them all.
Or, haply, through delighted tears,
Her mother's smiling shade appears,
And, her most dutcous child caressing,
Bestows on her a parent's blessing,
And tells that o'er these holy groves
Oft hangs the parent whom she loves.
How beauteous both in hours like these !
Prest in each other's arms, or on their knees,
They think of things for which no words are found ;
They need not speak : their looks express
More life-pervading tenderness
Than music's sweetest sound.
He thinks upon the dove-like rest
That broods within her pious breast ;
The holy calm, the hush divine,
Where pensive, night-like glories shine ;
Even as the mighty Ocean deep,
Yet clear and waveless as the sleep
Of some lone heaven-reflecting lake,
When evening-air its gleam forsake.
She thinks upon his love for her,
His wild, empassion'd character,

To whom a look, a kiss, a smile,
Rewards for danger and for toil !
His power of spirit unsubdued,
His fearlessness,—his fortitude,—
The radiance of his gifted soul,
Where never mists or darkness roll :
A poet's soul that flows for ever,
Right onwards like a noble river,
Refulgent still, or by its native woods
Shaded, and rolling on through sunless solitudes.

In love and mercy, sure on him had God
The sacred power that stirs the soul bestow'd ;
Nor fell his hymns on Mary's ear in vain ;
With brightening smiles the Vision hung
O'er the rapt poet while he sung,
More beauteous from the strain.
The songs he pour'd were sad and wild,
And while they would have sooth'd a child,
Who soon bestows his tears,
A deeper pathos in them lay
Than would have moved a hermit grey,
Bow'd down with holy years.
One song he had about a Ship
That perish'd on the Main,

So woeful, that his Mary pray'd,
At one most touching pause he made,
To cease the hearse-like strain :
And yet, in spite of all her pain,
Implored him, soon as he obey'd,
To sing it once again.
With faltering voice then would he sing
Of many a well-known far-off thing,
Towers, castles, lakes, and rills ;
Their names he gave not—could not give—
But happy ye, he thought, who live
Among the Cambrian hills.
Then of their own sweet Isle of Palms,
Full many a lovely lay
He sung ;—and of two happy sprites
Who live and revel in delights
For ever, night and day.
And who, even of immortal birth,
Or that for Heaven have left this earth,
Were e'er more blest than they !

But shall that bliss endure for ever ?
And shall these consecrated groves
Behold and cherish their immortal loves ?
Or must it come, the hour that is to sever

Those whom the Ocean in his wrath did spare ?
Awful that thought, and, like unto despair,
Oft to their hearts it sends an icy chill ;
Pain, death they fear not, come they when they will,
But the same fate together let them share ;
For how could either hope to die resign'd,
If God should say, " One must remain behind !"
Yet wisely doth the spirit shrink
From thought, when it is death to think ;
Or haply, a kind being turns
To brighter hopes the soul that mourns
In killing woe ; else many an eye,
Now glad, would weep its destiny.
Even so it fares with them : they wish to live
Long on this island, lonely though it be.
Old age itself to them would pleasure give,
For lo ! a sight, which it is heaven to see,
Down yonder hill comes glancing beautifully,
And with a silver voice most wildly sweet,
Flings herself, laughing, down before her parents' feet.

Are they in truth her parents ?—Was her birth
Not drawn from heavenly sire, and from the breast
Of some fair spirit, whose sinless nature glow'd
With purest flames, enamour'd of a God,

And gave this child to light in realms of rest ;
Then sent her to adorn these island bowers,
To sport and play with the delighted hours,
Till call'd again to dwell among the blest ?
Sweet are such fancies :—but that kindling smile
Dissolves them all !—Her native isle
This sure must be : If she in Heaven were born,
What breath'd into her face
That winning human grace,
Now dim, now dazzling like the break of morn ?
For, like the timid light of infant day,
That oft, when dawning, seems to die away,
The gleam of rapture from her visage flies,
Then fades, as if afraid, into her tender eyes.
Open thy lips, thou blessed thing, again !
And let thy parents live upon the sound ;
No other music wish they till they die.
For never yet disease, or grief, or pain,
Within thy breast the living lyre hath found,
Whose chords send forth that touching melody.
Sing on ! sing on ! it is a lovely air.
Well could thy mother sing it when a maid :
Yet strange it is in this wild Indian glade,
To list a tune that breathes of nothing there,
A tune that by his mountain-springs,

Beside his slumbering lambkins fair,
The Cambrian shepherd sings.

The air on her sweet lips hath died,
And as a harper, when his tune is play'd,
Pathetic though it be, with smiling brow
Haply doth careless fling his harp aside,
Even so regardlessly upstarteth now,
With playful frolic, the light-hearted maid,
As if, with a capricious gladness,
She strove to mock the soul of sadness,
Then mourning through the glade.
Light as a falling leaf that springs
Away before the zephyr's wings,
Amid the verdure seems to lie
Of motion reft, then suddenly,
With bird-like fluttering, mounts on high,
Up yon steep hill's unbroken side,
Behold the little Fairy glide.
Though free her breath, untired her limb,
For through the air she seems to swim,
Yet oft she stops to look behind
On them below ;—till with the wind
She flies again, and on the hill-top far
Shines like the spirit of the evening star.

Nor lingers long : as if a sight
Half-fear, half-wonder, urged her flight,
In rapid motion, winding still
To break the steepness of the hill,
With leaps, and springs, and out-stretch'd arms,
More graceful in her vain alarms,
The child outstrips the Ocean gale,
In haste to tell her wondrous tale.
Her parents' joyful hearts admire,
Of peacock's plumes her glancing tire,
All bright with tiny suns,
And the gleamings of the feathery gold,
That play along each wavy fold
Of her mantle as she runs.

“ What ails my child ? ” her mother cries,
Seeing the wildness in her eyes,
The wonder on her cheek ;
But fearfully she beckons still,
Up to her watch-tower on the hill,
Ere one word can she speak.
“ My Father ! Mother ! quickly fly
Up to the green-hill top with me,
And tell me what you there descry ;
For a cloud hath fallen from the sky,
And is sailing on the sea.”

They wait not to hear that word again :
The steep seems level as the plain,
And up they glide with ease :
They stand one moment on the height
In agony, then bless the sight,
And drop upon their knees.
“ A Ship ! ”—no more can Mary say,
“ A blessed Ship ! ” and faints away.—
Not so the happy sight subdues
Fitz-Owen’s heart ;—he calmly views
The gallant vessel toss
Her prow superbly up and down,
As if she wore the Ocean Crown ;
And now, exulting in the breeze,
With new-woke English pride he sees
St George’s blessed Cross.

Behold them now, the happy three,
Hang up a signal o’er the sea,
And shout with echoing sound,
While, gladden’d by her parents’ bliss,
The child prints many a playful kiss
Upon their hands, or, mad with glee,
Is dancing round and round.
Scarce doth the thoughtless infant know
Why thus their tears like rain should flow,

Yet she must also weep ;
Such tears as innocence doth shed
Upon its undisturbed bed,
When dreaming in its sleep.
And oft, and oft, her father presses
Her breast to his, and bathes her tresses,
Her sweet eyes, and fair brow.
“ How beautiful upon the wave
The vessel sails, who comes to save !
Fitting it was that first she shone
Before the wondering eyes of one,
So beautiful as thou.
See how before the wind she goes,
Scattering the waves like melting snows !
Her course with glory fills
The sea for many a league !—Descending,
She stoopeth now into the vale,
Now, as more freshly blows the gale,
She mounts in triumph o’er the watery hills.
Oh ! whither is she tending ?
She holds in sight yon shelter’d bay ;
As for her crew, how blest are they !
See ! how she veers around !
Back whirl the waves with louder sound ;
And now her prow points to the land :
For the Ship, at her glad lord’s command,
Doth well her helm obey.”

They cast their eyes around the isle :
But what a change is there !
For ever fled that lonely smile
That lay on earth and air,
That made its haunts so still and holy,
Almost for bliss too melancholy,
For life too wildly fair.
Gone—gone is all its loneliness,
And with it much of loveliness.
Into each deep glen's dark recess,
The day-shine pours like rain,
So strong and sudden is the light
Reflected from that wonder bright,
Now tilting o'er the Main.
Soon as the thundering cannon spoke,
The voice of the evening-gun
The spell of the enchantment broke,
Like dew beneath the sun.
Soon shall they hear th' unwonted cheers
Of these delighted mariners,
And the loud sound of the oar,
As bending back away they pull,
With measured pause, most beautiful,
Approaching to the shore.
For her yards are bare of man and sail,
Nor moves the giant to the gale ;

But, on the Ocean's breast,
With storm-proof cables, stretching far,
There lies the stately Ship of War ;
And glad is she of rest.

Ungrateful ye ! and will ye sail away,
And leave your bower to flourish and decay,
Without one parting tear ?
Where you have slept, and loved, and pray'd,
And with your smiling infant play'd
For many a blessed year !
No ! not in vain that bower hath shed
Its blossoms o'er your marriage-bed,
Nor the sweet Moon look'd down in vain,
Forgetful of her heavenly reign,
On them whose pure and holy bliss
Even beautified that wilderness.
To every rock, and glade, and dell,
You now breathe forth a sad farewell.
“ Say ! wilt thou ever murmur on
With that same voice when we are gone.
Beloved stream !—Ye birds of light !
And in your joy as musical as bright,
Still will you pour that thrilling strain,
Unheard by us who sail the distant main ?

We leave our nuptial bower to you !
There still your harmless loves renew,
And there, as they who left it, blest,
The loveliest ever build your nest.
Farewell once more—for now and ever !
Yet, though unhopèd-for mercy sever
Our lives from thee, where grief might come at last ;
Yet whether chain'd in tropic calms,
Or driven before the blast,
Most surely shall our spirits never
Forget the Isle of Palms.”—

“ What means the Ship ?” Fitz-Owen cries,
And scarce can trust his startled eyes,
“ While safely she at anchor swings,
Why doth she thus expand her wings ?
She will not surely leave the bay,
Where sweetly smiles the closing day,
As if it tempted her to stay ?
O cruel Ship ! ’tis even so :
No sooner come than in haste to go ;
Angel of bliss ! and fiend of woe ! ”—
—“ Oh ! let that God who brought her here,
My husband’s wounded spirit cheer !
Mayhap the ship for months and years
Hath been among the storms, and fears

You lowering cloud, that on the wave
Flings down the shadow of a grave ;
For well thou know'st the bold can be
By shadows daunted, when they sail the sea.
Think, in our own lost Ship, when o'er our head
Walk'd the sweet Moon in unobscured light,
How oft the sailors gazed with causeless dread
On her, the glory of the innocent night,
As if in those still hours of heavenly joy,
They saw a spirit smiling to destroy.
Trust that, when morning brings her light,
The sun will shew a glorious sight,
This very Ship in joy returning
With outspread sails and ensigns burning,
To quench in bliss our causeless mourning."—
—" O Father ! look with kinder eyes
On me,"—the Fairy-infant cries.
" Though oft thy face hath look'd most sad,
At times when I was gay and glad,
These are not like thy other sighs.
But that I saw my Father grieve,
Most happy when yon thing did leave
Our shores, was I :—Mid waves and wind,
Where, Father ! could we ever find
So sweet an island as our own ?

And so we all would think, I well believe,
Lamenting, when we look'd behind,
That the Isle of Palms was gone."—

Oh blessed child ! each artless tone
Of that sweet voice, thus plaintively
Breathing of comfort to thyself unknown,
Who feelest not how beautiful thou art,
Sinks like an anthem's pious melody
Into thy father's agitated heart,
And makes it calm and tranquil as thy own.
A shower of kisses bathes thy smiling face,
And thou, rejoicing once again to hear
The voice of love so pleasant to thine ear,
Thorough the brake, and o'er the lawn,
Bounding along like a sportive fawn,
With laugh and song renew'st thy devious race ;
Or round them, like a guardian sprite,
Dancing with more than mortal grace,
Steepest their gazing souls in still delight.
For how could they, thy parents, see
Thy innocent and fearless glee,
And not forget, but one short hour ago,
When the Ship sail'd away, how bitter was their woe ?
—Most like a dream it doth appear,

When she, the vanish'd Ship, was here :—
A glimpse of joy, that, while it shone,
Was surely passing-sweet :—now it is gone,
Not worth one single tear.

THE
ISLE OF PALMS.

CANTO FOURTH.

THE
ISLE OF PALMS.

CANTO FOURTH.

A SUMMER Night descends in balm
On the orange-bloom, and the stately Palm,
Of that romantic steep,
Where, silent as the silent hour,
'Mid the soft leaves of their Indian bower,
Three happy spirits sleep.
And we will leave them to themselves,
To the moon and the stars, these happy elves,
To the murmuring wave, and the zephyr's wing,
That dreams of gentlest joyance bring
To bathe their slumbering eyes ;
And on the moving clouds of night,
I high o'er the main will take our flight,
Where beauteous Albion lies.
Wondrous, and strange, and fair, I ween,
The sounds, the forms, the hues have been

Of these delightful groves ;
And mournful as the melting sky,
Or a faint-remember'd melody,
The story of their loves.
Yet though they sleep, those breathings wild,
That told of the Fay-like sylvan child,
And of them who live in lonely bliss,
Like bright flowers of the wilderness,
Happy and beauteous as the sky
That views them with a loving eye,
Another tale I have to sing,
Whose low and plaintive murmuring
May well thy heart beguile,
And when thou weep'st along with me,
Through tears no longer may'st thou see
That fairy Indian Isle.

Among the Cambrian hills we stand !
By dear compulsion chain'd unto the strand
Of a still Lake, yet sleeping in the mist,
The thin blue mist that beautifies the morning ;
Old Snowdon's gloomy brow the sun hath kiss'd,
Till, rising like a giant from his bed,
High o'er the mountainous sea he lifts his head,
The loneliness of Nature's reign adorning
With a calm majesty and pleasing dread.

A spirit is singing from the coves
Yet dim and dark ; that spirit loves
To sing unto the Dawn,
When first he sees the shadowy veil,
As if by some slow-stealing gale,
From her fair face withdrawn.
How the Lake brightens while we gaze !
Impatient for the flood of rays
That soon will bathe its breast ;
Where rock, and hill, and cloud and sky,
Even like its peaceful self, will lie
Ere long in perfect rest.
The dawn hath brighten'd into day :
Blessings be on yon crescent-bay,
Beloved in former years !
Dolbardan ! at this silent hour,
More solemn far thy lonely tower
Unto my soul appears,
Than when, in days of roaming youth,
I saw thee first, and scarce could tell
If thou wert frowning there in truth,
Or only raised by Fancy's spell,
An airy tower 'mid an unearthly dell.

O ! wildest Bridge, by human hand e'er framed !
If so thou mayst be named :

Thou ! who for many a year hast stood
Cloth'd with the deep-green moss of age,
As if thy tremulous length were living wood,
Sprung from the bank on either side,
Despising, with a careless pride,
The tumults of the wintry flood,
And hill-born tempest's rage.
Each flower upon thy moss I know,
Or think I know ; like things they seem
Fair and unchanged of a returning dream !
While underneath, the peaceful flow
Of the smooth river to my heart
Brings back the thoughts that long ago
I felt, when forced to part
From the deep calm of Nature's reign,
To walk the world's loud scenes again.
And let us with that river glide
Around yon hillock's verdant side ;
And lo ! a gleam of sweet surprise.
Like sudden sunshine, warms thine eyes.
White as the spring's unmelted snow,
That lives though winter-storms be o'er.
A Cot beneath the mountain's brow
Smiles through its shading sycamore.
The silence of the morning air
Persuades our hearts to enter there.

In dreams all quiet things we love ;
 And sure no star that lies above,
 Cradled in clouds, that also sleep,
 Enjoys a calm more lush and deep
 Than doth this slumbering cell :
 Yea ! like a star it looketh down
 In pleasure from its mountain-throne,
 On its own little dell.

A lovelier form now meets mine eye,
 Than the loveliest cloud that sails the sky !
 And human feelings blend
 With the pleasure born of the glistening air,
 As in our dreams uprises fair
 The face of a dear friend.
 A vision glides before my brain,
 Like her who lives beyond the Main !
 Breathing delight, the beauteous flower
 That Heaven had raised to grace this bower.
 To me this field is holy ground !
 Her voice is speaking in the sound
 That cheers the streamlet's bed.
 Sweet Maiden !—side by side we stand,
 While gently moves beneath my hand
 Her soft and silky head.

A moment's pause ! and as I look
On the silent cot and the idle brook,
And the face of the quiet day,
I know from all that many a year
Hath slowly past in sorrow here,
Since Mary went away.
But that wreath of smoke now melting thin,
Tells that some being dwells within ;
And the balmy breath that stole
From the rose-tree, and jasmin, clustering wide,
O'er all the dwelling's blooming side,
Tells that whoc'er doth there abide,
Must have a gentle soul.

Then gently breathe, and softly tread,
As if thy steps were o'er the dead !
Break not the slumber of the air,
Even by the whisper of a prayer,
But in thy spirit let there be
A silent " Benedicite !"
Thine eye falls on the vision bright,
As she sits amid the lonely light
That gleams from her cottage-hearth :
O ! fear not to gaze on her with love !
For, though these looks are from above.
She is a form of earth.

In the silence of her long distress,
She sits with pious stateliness ;
As if she felt the eye of God
Were on her childless lone abode.
While her lips move with silent vows,
With saintly grace the phantom bows
Over a Book spread open on her knee.
O blessed Book ! such thoughts to wake !
It tells of Him who for our sake
Died on the cross,—Our Saviour's History.
How beautifully hath sorrow shed
Its mildness round her aged head !
How beautifully her sorrow lies
In the solemn light of her faded eyes !
And lo ! a faint and feeble trace
Of hope yet lingers on her face,
That she may yet embrace again
Her child, returning from the Main ;
For the brooding dove shall leave her nest,
Sooner than hope a mother's breast.

Her long-lost child may still survive !
That thought hath kept her wasted heart alive ;
And often, to herself unknown,
Hath mingled with the midnight sigh,

When she breathed, in a voice of agony,
“ Now every hope is gone !”
’Twas this that gave her strength to look
On the mossy banks of the singing brook,
Where Mary oft had play’d ;
And duly, at one stated hour,
To go in calmness to the bower
Built in her favourite glade.
’Twas this that made her, every morn,
As she bless’d it, bathe the ancient thorn
With water from the spring ;
And gently tend each flow’ret’s stalk,
For she call’d to mind who loved to walk
Through their fragrant blossoming.
Yea ! the voice of hope oft touch’d her ear
From the hymn of the lark that caroll’d clear,
Through the heart of the silent sky.
“ Oh ! such was my Mary’s joyful strain !
And such she may haply sing again
Before her Mother die.”
Thus hath she lived for seven long years,
With gleams of comfort through her tears ;
Thus hath that beauty to her face been given !
And thus, though silver grey her hair.
And pale her cheek, yet is she fair
As any Child of Heaven !

Yet, though she thus in calmness sit,
Full many a dim and ghastly fit
Across her brain hath roll'd :
Oft hath she swoon'd away from pain ;
And when her senses came again,
Her heart was icy-cold.
Hard hath it been for her to bear
The dreadful silence of the air
At night, around her bed ;
When her waking thoughts through the darkness grew
Hideous as dreams, and for truth she knew
That her dear child was dead.
Things loved before seem alter'd quite,
The sun himself yields no delight,
She hears not the neighbouring waterfall,
Or, if she hear, the tones recall
The thought of her, who once did sing
So sweetly to its murmuring.
No summer-gale, no winter-blast,
By day or night o'er her cottage pass'd,
If her restless soul did wake,
That brought not a Ship before her eyes ;
Yea ! often dying shrieks and cries
Sail'd o'er Llanberris Lake,
Though, far as the charm'd eye could view,

Upon the quiet earth it lay,
Like the Moon amid the heavenly way,
As bright and silent too.

Hath she no friend whose heart may share
With her the burthen of despair,
And by her earnest, soothing voice,
Bring back the image of departed joys
So vividly, that reconciled
To the drear silence of her cot,
At times she scarcely miss her child ?
Or, the wild raving of the sea forgot,
Hear nought amid the calm profound,
Save Mary's voice, a soft and silver sound ?
No ! seldom human footsteps come
Unto her childless widow'd home ;
No friend like this e'er sits beside her fire :
For still doth selfish happiness
Keep far away from real distress,
Loath to approach, and eager to retire.
The vales are wide, the torrents deep,
Dark are the nights, the mountains steep,
And many a cause, without a name,
Will from our spirits hide the blame,
When, thinking of ourselves, we cease
To think upon another's peace ;

Though one short hour to sorrow given,
Would cheer the gloom, and win the applause of Heaven.
Yet, when by chance they meet her on the hill,
Or lonely wandering by the sullen rill,
By its wild voice to dim seclusion led,
The shepherds linger on their way,
And unto God in silence pray,
To bless her hoary head.
In churchyard on the Sabbath-day
They all make room for her, even they
Whose tears are falling down in showers
Upon the fading funeral flowers,
Which they have planted o'er their children's clay.
And though her faded cheeks be dry,
Her breast unmoved by groan or sigh,
More piteous is one single smile
Of hers, than many a tear ;
For she is wishing all the while
That her head were lying here ;
Since her dear daughter is no more,
Drown'd in the sea, or buried on the shore.

A sudden thought her brain hath cross'd ;
And in that thought all woes are lost,
Though sad and wild it be :

Why must she still, from year to year,
In lonely anguish linger here ?
Let her go, ere she die, unto the coast,
And dwell beside the sea ; ‘
The sea that tore her child away,
When glad would she have been to stay.
An awful comfort to her soul
To hear the sleepless Ocean roll !
To dream, that on his boundless breast,
Somewhere her long-wept child might rest ;
On some far island wreck’d, yet blest
Even as the sunny wave.
Or, if indeed her child is drown’d,
For ever let her drink the sound
That day and night still murmurs round
Her Mary’s distant grave.
—She will not stay another hour ;
Her feeble limbs with youthful power
Now feel endow’d ; she hath ta’en farewell
Of her native stream, and hill and dell ;
And with a solemn tone
Upon the bower implores a blessing,
Where often she had sate caressing
Her who, she deems, is now a saint in Heaven.
Upon her hearth the fire is dead,
The smoke in air hath vanished ;

The last long lingering look is given,
The shuddering start,—the inward groan,—
And the Pilgrim on her way hath gone.

Behold her on the lone sea-shore,
Listening unto the hollow roar
That with eternal thunder, far and wide,
Clothes the black-heaving Main ! she stands
Upon the cold and moisten'd sands,
Nor in that deep trance sees the quickly-flowing tide.
She feels it is a dreadful noise,
That in her bowed soul destroys
A Mother's hope, though blended with her life ;
But surely she hath lost her child,
For how could one so weak and mild
Endure the Ocean's strife,
Who, at this moment of dismay,
Howls like a monster o'er his prey !
But the tide is rippling at her feet,
And the murmuring sound, so wildly sweet,
Dispels these torturing dreams :
Oh ! once again the sea behold,
O'er all its wavy fields of gold,
The playful sun-light gleams.
These little harmless waves so fair,
Speak not of sorrow or despair ;

How soft the zephyr's breath !
It sings like joy's own chosen sound ;
While life and pleasure dance around,
Why must thou muse on death ?
Here even the timid child might come,
To dip her small feet in the foam ;
And, laughing as she view'd
The billows racing to the shore,
Lament when their short course was o'er,
Pursuing and pursued.
How calmly floats the white sea-mew
Amid the billows' verdant hue !
How calmly mounts into the air,
As if the breezes blew her there !
How calmly on the sand alighting,
To dress her silken plumes delighting !
See ! how these tiny vessels glide
With all sails set, in mimic pride,
As they were ships of war.
All leave the idle port to-day,
And with oar and sheet the sunny bay
Is glancing bright and far.

She sees the joy, but feels it not :
If e'er her child should be forgot
For one short moment of oblivious sleep,

It seems a wrong to one so kind,
Whose mother, left on earth behind,
Hath nought to do but weep.
For, wandering in her solitude,
Tears seem to her the natural food
Of widow'd childless age ;
And bitter though these tears must be,
Which falling there is none to see,
Her anguish they assuage.
A calm succeeds the storm of grief,
A settled calm, that brings relief,
And half partakes of pleasure, soft and mild ;
For the spirit, that is sore distressed,
At length, when wearied into rest,
Will slumber like a child.
And then, in spite of all her woe,
The bliss, that charm'd her long ago,
Bursts on her like the day.
Her child, she feels, is living still,
By God and angels kept from ill
On some isle far away.
It is not doom'd that she must mourn
For ever ;—One may yet return
Who soon will dry her tears :
And now that seven long years are flown,
Though spent in anguish and alone,

How short the time appears !
She looks upon the billowy Main,
And the parting-day returns again ;
Each breaking wave she knows ;
And when she listens to the tide,
Her child seems standing by her side ;
So like the past it flows.
She starts to hear the city-bell ;
So toll'd it when they wept farewell !
She thinks the self-same smoke and cloud
The city domes and turrets shroud ;
The same keen flash of ruddy fire
Is burning on the lofty spire ;
The grove of masts is standing there
Unchanged, with all their ensigns fair ;
The same, the stir, the tumult, and the hum,
As from the city to the shore they come.

Day after day, along the beach she roams,
And evening finds her there, when to their homes
All living things have gone.
No terrors hath the surge of storm
For her ;—on glides the aged form,
Still restless and alone.
Familiar unto every eye
She long hath been : her low deep sigh

Hath touch'd with pity many a thoughtless breast :
And prayers, unheard by her, are given,
That in its mercy watchful Heaven
Would send the aged rest.
As on the smooth and harden'd sand,
In many a gay and rosy band,
Gathering rare shells, delighted children stray,
With pitying gaze they pass along,
And hush at once the shout and song,
When they chance to cross her way.
The strangers, as they idly pace
Along the beach, if her they meet,
No more regard the sea : her face
Attracts them by its solemn grace,
So mournful, yet so sweet.
The boisterous sailor passes by
With softer step, and o'er his eye
A haze will pass most like unto a tear ;
For he hath heard, that, broken-hearted,
Long, long ago, that mother parted
With her lost daughter here.
Such kindness soothes her soul, I ween,
As through the harbour's busy scene,
She passes weak and slow.
A comfort sad it brings to see

That others pity her, though free
Themselves from care or woe.

The playful voice of streams and rills,
The echo of the cavern'd hills,
The murmur of the trees,
The bleat of sheep, the song of bird,
Within her soul no more are heard ;
There, sound for aye the seas.
Seldom she hears the ceaseless din
That stirs the busy port. Within
A murmur dwells, that drowns all other sound :
And oft, when dreaming of her child,
Her tearful eyes are wandering wild,
Yet nought behold around.
But hear and see she must this day ;
Her sickening spirit must obey
The flashing and the roar
That burst from fort, and ship, and tower,
While clouds of gloomy splendour lower
O'er city, sea, and shore.
The pier-head, with a restless crowd,
Seems all alive ; there, voices loud
Oft raise the thundrous cheer,
While, from on board the ship of war,
The music bands both near and far

Are playing, faint or clear.
The bells ring quick a joyous peal,
Till the very spires appear to feel
The joy that stirs throughout their tapering height
Ten thousand flags and pendants fly
Abroad, like meteors in the sky,
So beautiful and bright.
And, while the storm of pleasure raves
Through each tumultuous street,
Still strikes the ear one darling tune,
Sung hoarse, or warbled sweet ;
Well doth it suit the First of June,
“ Britannia rule the Waves !” .

What Ship is she that rises slow
Above the horizon ?—White as snow,
And cover'd as she sails
By the bright sunshine, fondly woo'd
In her calm beauty, and pursued
By all the Ocean gales ?
Well doth she know this glorious morn,
And by her subject waves is borne,
As in triumphal pride :
And now the gazing crowd descry,
Distinctly floating on the sky,
Her pendants long and wide,

The outward forts she now hath pass'd ;
Loftier and loftier towers her mast ;
You almost hear the sound
Of the billows rushing past her sides,
As giant-like she calmly glides
Through the dwindled ships around.
Saluting thunders rend the Main !
Short silence !—and they roar again,
And veil her in a cloud :
Then up leap all her fearless crew,
And cheer till shore, and city too,
With echoes answer loud.
In peace and friendship doth she come,
Rejoicing to approach her home,
After absence long and far :
Yet with like calmness would she go,
Exulting to behold the foe,
And break the line of war.

While all the noble Ship admire,
Why doth One from the crowd retire,
Nor bless the stranger bright ?
So look'd the Ship that bore away
Her weeping child ! She dares not stay,
Death-sickening at the sight.

Like a ghost, she wanders up and down
Throughout the still deserted town,
Wondering, if in that noisy throng,
Amid the shout, the dance, the song,
One wretched heart there may not be,
That hates its own mad revelry !
One mother, who hath lost her child,
Yet in her grief is reconciled
To such unmeaning sounds as these
Yet this may be the mere disease
Of grief with her : for why destroy
The few short hours of human joy,
Though Reason own them not ?—" Shout on," she
cries,
" Ye thoughtless, happy souls ! A mother's sighs
Must not your bliss profane.
Yet blind must be that mother's heart
Who loves thee, beautiful as thou art,
Thou Glory of the Main !"

Towards the church-yard see the Matron turn !
There surely she in solitude may mourn,
Tormented not by such distracting noise.
But there seems no peace for her this day,
For a crowd advances on her way,
As if no spot were sacred from their joys.

—Fly not that crowd ! for Heaven is there !
It breathes around thee in the air,
Even now, when unto dim despair
Thy heart was sinking fast :
A cruel lot hath long been thine ;
But now let thy face with rapture shine,
For bliss awaiteth thee divine,
And all thy woes are past.
Dark words she hears among the crowd,
Of a ship that hath on board
Three Christian souls, who on the coast
Of some wild land were wreck'd long years ago,
When all but they were in a tempest lost,
And now by Heaven are rescued from their woe,
And to their country wondrously restored.
The name, the blessed name, she hears,
Of that beloved Youth,
Whom once she call'd her son ; but fears
To listen more, for it appears
Too heavenly for the truth.
And they are speaking of a child,
Who looks more beautifully wild
Than pictured fairy in Arabian tale ;
Wondrous her foreign garb, they say,
Adorn'd with starry plumage gay,

While round her head tall feathers play,
And dance with every gale.

Breathless upon the beach she stands,
And lifts to Heaven her clasped hands,
And scarcely dares to turn her eye
On yon gay barge fast rushing by.
The dashing oar disturbs her brain
With hope, that sickens into pain.
The boat appears so wondrous fair,
Her daughter must be sitting there !
And as her gilded prow is dancing
Through the land-swell, and gaily glancing
Beneath the sunny gleams,
Her heart must own, so sweet a sight,
So form'd to yield a strange delight,
She ne'er felt even in dreams.
Silent the music of the oar !
The eager sailors leap on shore,
And look, and gaze around,
If 'mid the crowd they may descry
A wife's, a child's, a kinsman's eye,
Or hear one family sound.
—No sailor, he, so fondly pressing
Yon fair child in his arms,
Her eyes, her brow, her bosom kissing,

And bidding her with many a blessing
To hush her vain alarms.

How fair that creature by his side,
Who smiles with languid glee,
Slow-kindling from a mother's pride !
Oh ! Thou alone may'st be
The mother of that fairy child :
These tresses dark, these eyes so wild,
That face with spirit beautified,
She owes them all to thee.

Silent and still the sailors stand,
To see the meeting strange that now befell.
Unwilling sighs their manly bosoms swell,
And o'er their eyes they draw the sun-burnt hand,
To hide the tears that grace their cheeks so well.
They lift the aged Matron from her swoon,
And not one idle foot is stirring there ;
For unto pity melts the sailor soon,
And chief when helpless woman needs his care.
She wakes at last, and with a placid smile,
Such as a saint might on her death-bed give,
Speechless she gazes on her child awhile,
Content to die since that dear one doth live.
And much they fear that she indeed will die !
So cold and pale her cheek, so dim her eye ;—

And when her voice returns, so like the breath
It sounds, the low and tremulous tones of death.
Mark her distracted daughter seize
Her clay-cold hands, and on her knees
Implore that God would spare her hoary head ;
For sure, through these last lingering years,
By one so good, enough of tears
Hath long ere now been shed.
The Fairy-child is weeping too ;
For though her happy heart can slightly know
What she hath never felt, the pang of woe,
Yet to the holy power of Nature true,
From her big heart the tears of pity flow,
As infant morning sheds the purest dew.
Nought doth Fitz-Owen speak : he takes
His reverend mother on his filial breast,
Nor fears that, when her worn-out soul finds rest
In the new sleep of undisturbed love,
The gracious God who sees them from above,
Will save the parent for her children's sakes.

Nor vain his pious hope : the strife
Of rapture ends, and she returns to life,
With added beauty smiling in the lines
By age and sorrow left upon her face.
Her eye, even now bedimm'd with anguish, shines

With brightening glory, and a holy sense
In her husht soul of heavenly providence,
Breathes o'er her bending frame a loftier grace.
—Her Mary tells in simple phrase,
Of wildest perils past in former days,
Of shipwreck scarce remember'd by herself ;
Then will she speak of that delightful isle,
Where long they lived in love, and to the elf
Now fondly clinging to her grandam's knee,
In all the love of quick-won infancy,
Point with the triumph of a mother's smile.
The sweet child then will tell her tale
Of her own blossom'd bower, and palmy vale,
And birds with golden plumes, that sweetly sing
Tunes of their own, or borrow'd from her voice ;
And, as she speaks, lo ! flits with gorgeous wing
Upon her outstretch'd arm, a fearless bird,
Her eye obeying, ere the call was heard,
And wildly warbles there the music of its joys.

Unto the blessed Matron's eye
How changed seem now town, sea, and sky !
She feels as if to youth restored,
Such fresh and beauteous joy is pour'd
O'er the green dancing waves, and shelly sand.
The crowded masts within the harbour stand,

Emblems of rest : and yon ships far away,
Brightening the entrance of the Crescent-bay,
Seem things the tempest never can destroy,
To longing spirits harbingers of joy.
How sweet the music o'er the waves is borne,
In celebration of this glorious morn !
Ring on, ye bells ! most pleasant is your chime ;
And the quick flash that bursts along the shore,
The volumed smoke, and city-shaking roar,
Her happy soul now feels to be sublime.
How fair upon the human face appears
A kindling smile ! how idle all our tears !
Short-sighted still the moisten'd eyes of sorrow :
To-day our woes can never end,
Think we !—returns a long-lost friend,
And we are blest to-morrow.
Her anguish, and her wish to die,
Now seem like worst impiety,
For many a year she hopeth now to live ;
And God, who sees the inmost breast,
The vain repining of the sore distrest,
In mercy will forgive.

How oft, how long, and solemnly,
Fitz-Owen and his Mary gaze
On her pale check, and sunken eye !

Much alter'd since those happy days,
When scarcely could themselves behold
One symptom faint that she was waxing old.
That evening of her life how bright !
But now seems falling fast the night.
Yet the Welch air will breathe like balm
Through all her wasted heart, the heavenly calm
That mid her native mountains sleeps for ever,
In the deep vales,—even when the storms are roaring,
High up among the cliffs : and that sweet river
That round the white walls of her cottage flows,
With gliding motion most like to repose,
A quicker current to her blood restoring,
Will cheer her long before her eye-lids close.
And yonder cheek of rosy light,
Dark-clustering hair, and star-like eyes,
And Fairy-form, that wing'd with rapture flies,
And voice more wild than songstress of the night
E'er pour'd unto the listening skies ;
Yon spirit, who, with her angel smile,
Shed Heaven around the lonely isle,
With Nature, and with Nature's art,
Will twine herself about the heart
Of her who hoped not for a grand-child's kiss !
These looks will scare disease and pain,
Till in her wasted heart again
Life grow with new-born bliss.

Far is the city left behind,
And faintly-smiling through the soft-blue skies,
Like castled clouds the Cambrian hills arise :
Sweet the first welcome of the mountain-wind !
And ever nearer as they come,
Beneath the hastening shades of silent Even,
Some old familiar object meets their sight,
Thrilling their hearts with sorrowful delight,
Until through tears they hail their blessed home,
Bathed in the mist, confusing earth with heaven.
With solemn gaze the aged matron sees
The green roof laughing beneath greener trees ;
And thinks how happy she will live and die
Within that cot at last, beneath the eye
Of them long wept as perish'd in the seas.
And what feel they ? with dizzy brain they look
On cot, field, mountain, garden, tree, and brook, -
With none contented, although loving all ;
While deep-delighted memory,
By faint degrees, and silently,
Doth all their names recall.
And looking in her mother's face,
With smiles of most bewitching grace,
In a wild voice that wondering pleasure calms,
Exclaims the child, " Is this home ours ?

Ah me ! how like these lovely flowers
To those I train'd upon the bowers
Of our own Isle of Palms !”

Husht now these island-bowers as death !
And ne'er may human foot or breath,
Their dew disturb again ; but not more still
Stand they, o'er-shadowed by their palmy hill,
Than this deserted cottage ! O'er the green,
Once smooth before the porch, rank weeds are seen,
Choking the feebler flowers : with blossoms hoar,
And verdant leaves, the unpruned eglantine
In wanton beauty foldeth up the door.
And through the clustering roses that entwine
The lattice-window, neat and trim before,
The setting sun's slant beams no longer shine.
The hive stands on the ivied tree,
But murmurs not one single bee ;
Frail looks the osier-seat, and grey,
None hath sat there for many a day ;
And the dial, hid in weeds and flowers,
Hath told, by none beheld, the solitary hours
No birds that love the haunts of men,
Hop here, or through the garden sing ;
From the thick-matted hedge, the lonely wren
Flits rapid by on timid wing,

Even like a leaf by wandering zephyr moved.
But long it is since that sweet bird,
That twitters 'neath the cottage eaves,
Was here by listening morning heard :
For she, the summer-songstress, leaves
The roof by laughter never stirr'd,
Still loving human life, and by it still beloved.

O ! wildest cottage of the wild !
I see thee waking from thy breathless sleep !
Scarcely distinguish'd from the rocky steep,
High o'er thy roof in forms fantastic piled.
More beauteous art thou than of yore,
With joy all glistening after sorrow's gloom ;
And they who in that paradise abide,
By sadness and misfortune beautified,
There brighter walk than o'er yon island-shore,
As loveliness wakes lovelier from the tomb.
Long may'st thou stand in sun and dew,
And spring thy faded flowers renew,
Unharm'd by frost or blight !
Without, the wonder of each eye,
Within, as happy as the sky,
Encompass'd with delight.
—May thy old-age be calm and bright,
Thou grey-hair'd one !—like some sweet night

Of winter, cold, but clear, and shining far
Through mists, with many a melancholy star.
—O Fairy-child ! what can I wish for thee ?
Like a perennial flow'ret may'st thou be,
That spends its life in beauty and in bliss !
Soft on thee fall the breath of time,
And still retain in heavenly clime
The bloom that charm'd in this !

O, happy Parents of so sweet a child,
Your share of grief already have you known ;
But long as that fair spirit is your own,
To either lot you must be reconciled. ♫
Dear was she in yon palmy grove,
When fear and sorrow mingled with your love,
And oft you wish'd that she had ne'er been born ;
While, in the most delightful air
Th' angelic infant sang, at times her voice,
That seem'd to make even lifeless things rejoice,
Woke, on a sudden, dreams of dim despair,
As if it breathed, " For me, an Orphan, mourn !"
Now can they listen when she sings
With mournful voice of mournful things,
Almost too sad to hear ;
And when she chants her evening-hymn,
Glad smile their eyes, even as they swim

With many a gushing tear.
Each day she seems to them more bright
And beautiful,—a gleam of light
That plays and dances o'er the shadowy earth !
It fadeth not in gloom or storm,—
For Nature charter'd that ærial form
In yonder fair Isle when she bless'd her birth !
The Isle of Palms ! whose forests tower again,
Darkening with solemn shade the face of heaven.
Now far away they like the clouds are driven,
And as the passing night-wind dies my strain !

END OF THE ISLE OF PALMS.

THE
CITY OF THE PLAGUE.

THE
CITY OF THE PLAGUE.

ACT I.

SCENE I.

Time, the Afternoon.—Two Naval Officers walking along the banks of the Thames.—They sit down on a stone seat fronting the river.

Frankfort. My heart feels heavier every step I take
Towards the city. Oh! that I could drop
Down like a bird upon its nest, at once
Into my mother's house. There might my soul
Find peace, even 'mid the silent emptiness
That told me she had perish'd.

Wilnot. All around
Appears so bright, so tranquil, and so calm,
That happy omens rise on every side,
To strengthen and support us in our fears.

Frank. Oh Wilmot ! to my soul a field of graves,
A church-yard fill'd with marble monuments,
Profoundly hush'd in death's own sanctity,
Seems not more alien to the voice of Hope,
Than that wide wilderness of domes and spires,
Hanging o'er the breathless city.

Wil. See ! my friend,
How bright the sunshine dances in its joy
O'er the still flow of this majestic river.
I know not how, but gazing on that light
So beautiful, all images of death
Fade from my roused soul, and I believe
That our journey here must end in happiness.

Frank. Is it the hour of prayer ?

Wil. The evening service,
Methinks, must now be closed.

Frank. There comes no sound
Of organ-peal or choral symphony
From yonder vast cathedral. How it stands
Amid the silent houses, with a strange
Deep silence of its own ! I could believe
That many a Sabbath had pass'd prayerless on
Within its holy solitude. No knee
This day, methinks, hath bent before its altar.

Wil. It is a solemn pile ! yet to mine eye

There rests above its massive sanctity
The clear blue air of peace.

Frank. A solemn pile !
Ay ! there it stands, like a majestic ruin,
Mouldering in a desert ; in whose silent heart
No sound hath leave to dwell. I knew it once,
When music in that chosen temple raised
The adoring soul to Heaven. But one dread year
Hath done the work of ages ; and the Plague
Mocks in his fury the slow hand of time.

Wil. The sun smiles on its walls.

Frank. Why does the finger,
Yellow 'mid the sunshine on the Minster-clock,
Point at that hour? It is most horrible,
Speaking of midnight in the face of day.
During the very dead of night it stopp'd,
Even at the moment when a hundred hearts
Paused with it suddenly, to beat no more.
Yet, wherefore should it run its idle round?
There is no need that men should count the hours
Of time, thus standing on eternity.
It is a death-like image.

Wil. I could smile
At such fantastic terrors.

Frank. How can I,
When round me silent Nature speaks of death,

Withstand such monitory impulses ?
When yet far off I thought upon the plague,
Sometimes my mother's image struck my soul
In unchanged meekness and serenity,
And all my fears were gone. But these green banks,
With an unwonted flush of flowers o'ergrown,
Brown, when I left them last, with frequent feet,
From morn till evening hurrying to and fro,
In mournful beauty seem encompassing
A still forsaken city of the dead.

Wil. It is the Sabbath-day—the day of rest.

Frank. O unrejoicing Sabbath ! not of yore
Did thy sweet evenings die along the Thames
Thus silently ! Now every sail is furl'd,
The oar hath dropt from out the rower's hand,
And on thou flow'st in lifeless majesty,
River of a desert lately fill'd with joy !
O'er all that mighty wilderness of stone
The air is clear and cloudless as at sea
Above the gliding ship. All fires are dead,
And not one single wreath of smoke ascends
Above the stillness of the towers and spires.
How idly hangs that arch magnificent.
Across the idle river ! Not a speck
Is seen to move along it. There it hangs,
Still as a rainbow in the pathless sky.

Wil. Methinks such words bespeak a soul at rest,
And willing, in this universal calm,
To abide, whate'er it be, the doom of Fate.

Frank. I feel as if such solemn images
Of desolation had recall'd my soul
From its own individual wretchedness ;
As if one moment I forgot my parent,
And all the friends I love, in the sublime
And overwhelming presence of mortality.

Wil. Now, that your soul feels strong, let us proceed,
With humble hope, towards your mother's house.

Frank. No, friend ! here must we part ! If e'er again
We meet in this sad world, thou may'st behold
A wretch bow'd down to the earth by misery,
Ghost-like 'mid living men ; but rest assured,
O gentlest friend ! that, though my soul be dead
To all beside, at sight of thee 'twill burn
As with the everlasting fires of joy,
Bursting its bonds of mortal wretchedness.

Wil. We must not—will not part.

Frank. Now, and for ever.

I walk into yon city as the tomb !
A voice comes to me from its silent towers,
“ Mortal, thy days are number'd ! ” Ere I go,
Kiss me, and promise that my name shall live
Sacred for ever in thy memory.

Wil. We must not—will not part.

Frank. What said my friend ?

Wil. Here, by my father's soul (a fearless man,
Who used to say he never loved his friends
But in their combats with adversity,)
I swear, (and may we never meet in Heaven
If that dread oath be broken !) day and night,
Long as thou sojourn'st on thy work of love
Within this plague-struck city, at thy side
To move for ever an attending shadow ;
Amid the silence or the shrieks of death,
Serene in unappalled confidence,
That thou wilt walk unharm'd, wilt find the house
Of thy parent, and her holy family,
Pass'd over by the angel of the Lord !
For the blessings of the poor have sanctified
The widow's lowly porch—life still is there.

Frank. O friend ! most cruel from excess of love !
In all the beauty of thy untamed spirit
Thou walkest to perdition. Do not I
Look, as I feel, most like thy murderer ?
Return unto our ship.

Wil. Frankfort, remember,
When the wild cry, " A man is overboard,"
Rung through our decks, till dumb and motionless
Stood the whole crew, fear-stricken by the storm,

Who at that moment leapt into the sea,
And seized the drowning screamer by the hair?
Who was that glorious being? Who the wretch
Then rescued from the waves? I loved thee well
Before I hung upon thy saving arm
Above the angry waves. But, from that hour,
I felt my soul call'd on by Providence
To dedicate itself for aye to thee,
And God's will must be done.

Frank. Wilmot, dost think
My mother can be living?

Wil. The soul oft feels
Mysterious presence of realities
Coming we know not whence, yet banishing
With power omnipotent all misgiving fears.
So feel I at this moment—she is living.

Frank. O God forbid, that I should place belief
In these dim shadowings of futurity!
Here, on this very spot where we now rest,
Upon the morning I last sail'd from England,
My mother put her arms around my neck,
And in a solemn voice, unchok'd by tears,
Said, "Son, a last farewell!" That solemn voice,
Amid the ocean's roaring solitude,
Oft pass'd across my soul, and I have heard it

Steal in sad music from the sunny calm.
Upon our homeward voyage, when we spake
The ship that told us of the Plague, I knew
That the trumpet's voice would send unto our souls
Some dismal tidings ; for I saw her sails
Black in the distance, flinging off with scorn
A shower of radiance from the blessed sun,
As if her crew would not be comforted.

Wil. The weakness of affection, prone to fear !
Be comforted by me—my very dreams
Of late have all been joyous.

Frank. Joyous dreams !
My hours of sleep are now but few indeed,
Yet what have I still dreamt of ? healthful faces,
Round a sweet fire-side, bright with gratitude ?
The soft voice of domestic happiness ?
Laughter disturbing with the stir of joy
The reveries of the spirit ?—Oh ! my friend !
Far other sounds and sights have fill'd my dreams !
Still noiseless floors, untrod by human feet ;
Chairs standing rueful in their emptiness ;
An unswept hearth chok'd up by dust and ashes ;
Beds with their curtains idly hanging down
Unmov'd by the breath of life : wide open windows,
That the fresh air might purify the room
From vapours of the noisome pestilence ;

In a dark chamber, ice-cold like a tomb,
A corpse laid out—O God! my mother's corpse,
Woefully alter'd by a dire decay;
While my stunn'd spirit shudder'd at the toll,
The long, slow, dreary, sullen, mortal toll
Of a bell swinging to the hand of death.
But this is idle raving—hope is gone—
And fears and apprehensions, day and night,
Drive where they will my unresisting soul.

Wil. But that it is day-light, I could believe
That yonder, moving by the river side,
Came on a ghost. Did ever eye behold
A thing so death-like in the shape of man?

[*An old man of a miserable and squalid appearance comes up, carrying an infant in his arms.*]

Frank. God's blessing on thee! wilt thou rest, old
man,

Upon this traveller's seat?

Old Man. God's blessing on thee!

What, dost thou mean to taunt with mockery
An old man tottering to the grave? What pleasure
Can ye young wretches find in scoffing thus
At the white head of hunger'd beggary?
Have ye no fathers? Well it is for them
That their dry hearts are spared the bitterness

Of seeing, in the broad and open day,
Their reckless children sporting with old age.

Frank. Father, judge kindly of us.

Old Man.

Let me go

Untroubled on my way. Do you pity me ?

Then give me alms : this thing upon my arm

Is teasing me for food : I have it not—

Give me your alms.

Frank.

See ! here is bread, old man !

I ask your blessing—come you from the city,

And none to guide your steps along the brink

Of this great river ?

Old Man.

Yea ! they all are dead

Who once did walk with me most lovingly,

Slowlier than these slow steps. This piece of wood,

This staff, is all I have to lean on now,

And this poor baby, whom its nurse would give

For a short pastime to his grandsire's arms,

No other nurse hath now, but wither'd age—

Sour, sullen, hopeless, God-forsaken age.

Frank. Is the plague raging ?

Old Man.

Ay, and long will rage.

The judgments of the prophets of old time

Are now fulfilling. Young men ! turn and flee

From the devoted city. Would ye hear

What now is passing in yon monster's heart ?

Frank. We listen to thy voice.

Old Man. Three months ago,
Within my soul I heard a mighty sound
As of a raging river, day and night
Triumphing through the city : 'twas the voice
Of London sleepless in magnificence.
This morn I stood and listen'd. " Art thou dead,
Queen of the world !" I ask'd my awe-struck heart,
And not one breath of life amid the silence
Disturb'd the empire of mortality.
Death's icy hand hath frozen, with a touch,
The fountain of the river that made glad
The City of the Isle !

Frank. We hear thy voice.

Old Man. Sin brought the judgment : it was terrible.
Go read your Bible, young men ; hark to him
Who, in a vision, saw the Lion rage
Amid the towers of Judah, while the people
Fell on their faces, and the hearts of kings
Perish'd, and prophets wonder'd in their fear.
Then came the dry wind from the wilderness,
Towards the hill of Sion, not to fan
Or cleanse, but, whirlwind-like, to sweep away
The tents of princes and the men of war.

Frank. Wilmot ! methinks most like an ancient prophet,

With those white locks and wild unearthly eyes,
He comes forth from the desolated city,
A man who cannot die.—O may I ask,
Most reverend father, if——

Old Man.

Hush ! hush ! lie still !—

Didst hear this infant cry ? So small a sound
Ought not to startle thus a wretch who comes
From a three months' sojourn in a sepulchre.
Here ! infant, eat this bread, and hold thy peace.
Young men, disturb me not with foolish questions ;
Your faces are towards the city : Will ye dare
The monster in his den ? Then go and die !
Two little drops amid a shower of rain,
Swallow'd up in a moment by the heedless earth.

Frank. I fain would ask one question ; for, old man,
My parent lived in London, and I go
To seek her in that city of the tombs.

Old Man. Think of her with the dead ! A ship at
sea

(Methinks I speak unto a mariner)

Goes to the bottom. Would you hope to find
Your friend alone, of all the fated crew,
Alive on a plank next day amid the waves ?
Think of her with the dead ! and praise the Lord !

Wilmot. Let us begone, the day is wearing fast.

Old Man. Know ye what you will meet with in the city ?

Together will ye walk, through long, long streets,
All standing silent as a midnight church.
You will hear nothing but the brown red grass
Rustling beneath your feet ; the very beating
Of your own hearts will awe you ; the small voice
Of that vain bauble, idly counting time,
Will speak a solemn language in the desert.
Look up to heaven, and there the sultry clouds,
Still threatening thunder, lower with grim delight,
As if the Spirit of the Plague dwelt there,
Darkening the city with the shadows of death.
Know ye that hideous hubbub ? Hark, far off
A tumult like an echo ! on it comes,
Weeping and wailing, shrieks and groaning prayer ;
And louder than all, outrageous blasphemy.
The passing storm hath left the silent streets.
But are these houses near you tenantless ?
Over your heads from a window, suddenly
A ghastly face is thrust, and yells of death
With voice not human. Who is he that flies,
As if a demon dogg'd him on his path ?
With ragged hair, white face, and bloodshot eyes,
Raving, he rushes past you ; till he falls,
As if struck by lightning, down upon the stones,

Or, in blind madness, dash'd against the wall,
Sinks backward into stillness. Stand aloof,
And let the Pest's triumphal chariot
Have open way advancing to the tomb.
See how he mocks the pomp and pageantry
Of earthly kings ! A miserable cart,
Heap'd up with human bodies ; dragg'd along
By shrunk steeds, skeleton-anatomies !
And onwards urged by a wan meagre wretch,
Doom'd never to return from the foul pit,
Whither, with oaths, he drives his load of horror.
Would you look in ? Grey hairs and golden tresses,
Wan shrivell'd cheeks that have not smiled for years ;
And many a rosy visage smiling still ;
Bodies in the noisome weeds of beggary wrapt,
With age decrepit, and wasted to the bone ;
And youthful frames, august and beautiful,
In spite of mortal pangs,—there lie they all
Embraced in ghastliness ! But look not long,
For haply, 'mid the faces glimmering there,
The well-known cheek of some beloved friend
Will meet thy gaze, or some small snow-white hand,
Bright with the ring that holds her lover's hair.
Let me sit down beside you. I am faint
Talking of horrors that I look'd upon
At last without a shudder.

Frank. Give me the child.

Old Man. Let the wretch rest. 'Twas but a passing pang,

And I feel strong again.—Dost smile, poor babe ?
Yes ! Thou art glad to see the full-orb'd eye,
The placid cheek, and sparkling countenance
Of ruddy health once more ; and thou would'st go
With them thy young heart thinks so beautiful,
Nor ever look behind at the old man
Who brought thee from the grave ! Sweet thoughtless
wretch,

I cling to thee with a more desperate love
Because of thy ingratitude.

Frank. Old man,
Is thy blood in his veins ?

Old Man. All dead—all dead !
Round the baptismal font with awe we knelt,
My four sweet daughters and their loving husbands.
I held my last-born grandchild in my arms,
But as the hallow'd water touch'd her face,
Even then she sicken'd, and a mortal paleness
Froze every parent's cheek. " The Plague is here !"
The priest exclaim'd ; and like so many ghosts,
We parted in the church-yard. O my God !
I know that Thou in wrath art merciful,
For Thou hast spared this babe for my old age !

But all who knelt round that baptismal font
Last Sabbath morning—one short week ago—
Are dead and buried—save one little child,
And a grey-headed man of fourscore years.

Frank. I dare not comfort thee.

Old Man. Why not, sweet youth ?

Thy very voice is comfort—my dim eyes
Look on thee like a vision of delight
Coming back in beauty from th' abyss of years
Let me hear thy voice once more !

Frank. Father ! that book

With whose worn leaves the careless infant plays
Must be the Bible. Therein thy dim eyes
Will meet a cheering light, and silent words
Of mercy breath'd from Heaven, will be exhaled
From the blest page into thy wither'd heart.
The grace of God go with thee.

Old Man. Gentle youth

Thy voice reminds me of a boy who died
Thirty long years ago. Thou wilt pass on,
And we must meet no more ; yet could I think
Thou wert my son returning from the grave,
Or from some far-off land where he had gone,
And left us to our tears.

Frank. They are not lost

Who leave their parents for the calm of heaven.

Forgive a young man speaking thus to age,
'Tis done in love and reverence.

Old Man.

'Tis the Bible !

I know and feel it is a blessed book,
And I remember how it stopp'd my tears
In days of former sorrows, like some herb
Of sovereign virtue to a wound applied.
But thou wilt pity me, when I confess
That ofttimes more than mortal agony
Shoots through my heart, when the most holy words
Of Jesus shine before me. There I see
Miracles of mercy and of saving love :
The widow sings for joy,—deliverance
Comes to the madman howling in his chains,—
And life stirs in the tomb. I shut the book,
And wonder where I am ; for all around me
Looks as if God had left this woeful earth
To ruin and despair, while his own word
Doth seem delusion, or with fearful doubts
My soul disturbs in sore perplexity.
To the Hebrew prophecies my spirit turns,
And feeds on wailing lamentations,
And dim forebodings of Almighty wrath.
Yea ! often do I see this very Plague
By these wild seers foretold, and all their songs
So doleful speak unto my ringing ear

Of this dread visitation. Idle dreams
Of my old crazed brain ! But aye they haunt me,
And each plain phrase is clothed with mystic meaning
In spite of reason ; sad bewildering !
When still the soul keeps fighting with its fetters,
Yet hugs them self-imposed.

Frank. Such dreams will vanish
When the sweet rural air, or breeze from the sea
Sinks round thee. Art thou going to a home
Where wife or child expect thee ?

Old Man. Hush, sweet babe.
There is a dwelling on the lone sea-shore
Where I will carry thee.—An Angel's voice
Told me to leave the city. You will see her,
The Angel of the poor ! Through every street
The radiant creature walks

Wil. to Frank. Though dark his brain,
It has, thou seest, a heavenly visitor,
That comfort brings when reason's self is gone.

Old Man. 'Tis no delusion. When you see her face,
Her pale face smiling on you suddenly,
Pale almost as the raiment that she wears,
And hear her voice, all one low mournful tone,
Charming away despair, then will ye say
“ The Angel this of whom the old man spake ;”
Yet something lying far within her eyes

Will tell that she is mortal.—Fare ye well !
But list ! sweet youths ! where'er ye go, beware
Of those dread dwellings all round Aldgate-church,
For to me it seemeth that most dismal pile
Is the black Palace of the Plague, and none
May pass it by and live. God bless you both.

[*The Old Man passes on.*

Frank. His words have sent a curse into my heart.
The miserable spoke of misery
Even with his parting farewell. Aldgate-church !

Wil. He passeth like a shadow from the city !
A solemn traveller to the world of spirits.
Methought his hollow and unearthly voice
Came from the desolation of his soul,
Like the wind at midnight moaning past our ship,
A ghastly sound once heard and never more.
—Frankfort, speak to me.

Frank. All round Aldgate-church !
Said he not so ? Close to that churchyard wall
My mother's dwelling stands : her bed-room window
Looks o'er the grave-stones and the marble tombs.—
All hope is dead within me.

Wil. Shall I go
And ask the old man if he knows your mother ?
Perhaps

Frank. Oh ! ask him not, an hour will bring us
In presence of the house where I was born.

I wish he had staid with us yet a while,
For his voice held me in captivity,
Wild voice and haggard cheek. He heeded not
Me or my sorrow—in his misery
Both blind and deaf, without the help of age.
Methinks I see the cold wet tombstone lying
Upon my father's grave—another name,
“Mary his wife,” is graven

Wil.

All have not perish'd.

Frank. What, hoping still ! Come, let us onward walk
With heads uncover'd, and with prostrate souls,
Unto the humbled city of despair.
Amid the roar of ocean-solitude
God hath been with us, and his saving hand
Will be our anchor in this dreadful calm,
This waveless silence of the sea of death.

SCENE II.

*A great square in the city.—A multitude of miserable
Men and Women crowding round a Person of a wild
and savage appearance, dressed in a fantastical garb
with an hour-glass in his hand.*

Astrologer. The sun is going down, and when he sets,
You know my accursed gift of prophecy

Departeth from me, and I then become
Blind as my wretched brethren. Then the Plague
Riots in darkness 'mid his unknown victims,
Nor can I read the names within his roll
Now register'd in characters of blood.
Come to me, all ye wearied, who would rest,
Who would exchange the fever's burning pillow
For the refreshing coolness of the grave !
Come hither, all ye orphans of a day,
And I will tell you when your heads shall rest
Upon your parents' bosoms. Yearn ye not
To clasp their shroudless bodies, and to lie
In the dark pit by love made beautiful !
Where are ye, veiled widows ! in the tomb
The marriage-lamp doth burn unquenchably.
Dry up your tears, fair virgins ! to the grave
Betrothed in your pure simplicity !
Still is one countenance beautiful in death,
And it will lean to-night upon a breast
White with the snows of perfect innocence.
—I call upon the wicked ! let him show
His face among the crowd, and I will tell him
His dreams of horror and his works of sin.

*[A man of a fierce and ferocious aspect advances
from the crowd.]*

Stranger. I ask thee not, thou juggling driveller,

Whether the Plague hath fix'd his eyes on me,
Determined to destroy. Let them who fear
Death and his pit, with pale beseeching hands
Buy with their moneys the awards of fate,
And die in poverty. Thou speak'st of guilt,
And know'st forsooth each secret deed of sin
Done in the dark hour. Tell me, driveller !
Where I, who lay no claim to honesty,
Came by this gold. I'll give thee half of it
If thou speak'st truly. Was there robbery ?

Astrologer. Flee, murderer ! from my sight ! I touch
thy gold !

'Twould stain my fingers ! See the blood-gouts on it.
Hither thou com'st in savage hardihood,
Yet with a beating heart. I saw thee murder him :
What were his silver hairs, his tremulous voice,
His old blind eyes to thee !—Ha ! shrinking off,
Awed by a driveller ! Seize the murderer !
You will find the bloody knife——

[*The Man rushes off, and all make way for him.*

Mine eyes at once
Did read the murderer's soul.

Voice from the crowd. Guilt nor disease
Are hidden from his ken—he knows them all.

[*Two Women advance eagerly from the crowd.*

1st Woman. Listen to me before that woman speaks.

I went this morning to my lover's house,
Mine own betrothed husband, who had come
From sea two days ago. The house was empty ;
As the cold grave that longeth for its coffin,
'Twas damp and empty ; and I shriek'd in vain
On him who would not hear. Tell me his fate,
Say that he lives, or say that he is dead—
But tell me,—tell me, lest I curse my God,
Some tidings of him ; should'st thou see him lying
Even in yon dreadful pit. Do you hear ? speak, speak !
O God !—no words can be so terrible
As that mute face, whose blackness murders hope,
And freezes my sick soul. Heaven's curse light on thee,
For that dumb mockery of a broken heart !

Astrologer. I see him not, some cloud envelopes him !

Woman. He hath left the city then, and gone on
ship-board ?

Astrologer. I see him not, some cloud envelopes him !

Woman. What ! hast thou not a wondrous glass that
shows

Things past, or yet to come ? give me one look,
'That I may see his face so beautiful,
Where'er it be ; or in that ghastly pit,
Or smiling 'mid his comrades on the deck,
While favouring breezes waft his blessed ship

Far from the Plague, to regions of delight,
Where he may live for ever.

Astrologer. Is your lover
A tall thin youth, with thickly-clustering locks,
Sable and glossy as the raven's wing ?

Woman. Yes ! he is tall—I think that he is tall ;
His hair it is dark-brown—yes, almost black—
Many call it black—you see him ? Does he live ?

Astrologer. That pit containeth many beautiful :
But thy sailor, in his warlike garb, doth lie
Distinguish'd o'er the multitude of dead !
And all the crowd, when the sad cart was emptied,
Did weep and sob for that young mariner ;
Such corpse, they thought, should have been buried
Deep in the ocean's heart, and a proud peal
Of thunder roll'd above his sinking coffin.

Woman, (distractedly.) Must I believe him ? off, off
to the pit !

One look into that ghastliness,—one plunge :
None ever loved me but my gentle sailor,
And his sweet lips are cold—I will leap down.

[*She rushes madly away.*]

Voice from the crowd. Ay, she intends to look before
she leaps ;

Well—life is life—I would not part with it
For all the girls in Christendom. Forsooth !

2d Woman. Say! will my child recover from the
Plague?

Astrologer. Child! foolish woman! now thou hast
no child.

Hast thou not been from home these two long hours,
Here listening unto that which touch'd thee not,
And left'st thou not thy little dying child,
Sitting by the fire, upon a madman's knee?
Go home! and ask thy husband for thy child!
The fire was burning fierce and wrathfully,
Its father knew not that the thing he held
Upon his knee had life—and when it shriek'd,
Amid the flames, he sat and look'd at it,
With fixed eyeballs, and a stony heart.
Unnatural mother! worse than idiotcy
To leave a baby in a madman's lap,
And yet no fetters, from infanticide
To save his murderous hands.

Woman, (rushing away.) O God! O God!

Astrologer. Comeforward, thou with that most ghost-
like face,

Fit for a winding-sheet! and if those lips
So blue and quivering still can utter sounds,
What would'st thou say? The motions of thine eyes
Betoken some wild wish within thy heart.

[*A man comes forward, and lays down money
before the Astrologer.*]

Man. I trust my hour is near. I am alone
In this dark world, and I desire to die.

Astrologer. Thou shalt be kept alive by misery.
A tree doth live, long after rottenness
Hath eat away its heart : the sap of life
Moves through its wither'd rind, and it lives on ;
'Mid the green woods a rueful spectacle
Of mockery and decay.

Man. I feel 'tis so.
Thus have I been since first the Plague burst out,
A term methinks of many hundred years !
As if this world were hell, and I condemn'd
To walk through woe to all eternity.
I will do suicide.

Astrologer. Thou can'st not, fool !
Thou lovest life with all its agonies :
Buy poison, and 'twill lie for years untouch'd
Beneath thy pillow, when thy midnight horrors
Are at their worst. Coward ! thou can'st not die !

Man. He sees my soul ; a blast as if from hell
Drives me back from the grave—I dare not die.

[*He disappears among the crowd, and a young and
beautiful Lady approaches the Astrologer.*

Lady. O man of fate ! my lovely babes are dead !
My sweet twin-babes ! and at the very hour
Thy voice predicted, did my infants die.

My husband saw them both die in my arms,
And never shed a tear. Yet did he love them
Even as the wretch who bore them in her womb.
He will not speak to me, but ever sits
In horrid silence, with his glazed eyes
Full on my face, as if he loved me not—
O God ! as if he hated me ! I lean
My head upon his knees and say my prayers,
But no kind word, or look, or touch is mine.
Then will he rise and pace through all the rooms,
Like to a troubled ghost, or pale-faced man
Walking in his sleep. O tell me ! hath the Plague
E'er these wild symptoms ? Must my husband perish
Without the sense of his immortal soul ?
Or,—bless me for ever with the heavenly words,—
Say he will yet recover, and behold
His loving wife with answering looks of love.

Astrologer. Where are the gold, the diamonds, and
the pearls,

That erewhile, in thy days of vanity,
Did sparkle, star-like, through the hanging clouds
That shaded thy bright neck, that raven hair ?
Give them to me ; for many are the poor,
Nor shalt thou, Lady ! ever need again
This mortal being's frivolous ornaments.
Give me the gold you promised ; holiest alms

Add not a moment to our number'd days,
But the death of open-handed charity
Is on a bed of down. Hast thou the gold ?

Lady. All that I have is here. My husband gave me
This simple necklace on my marriage-day.
Take it ! Here is a picture set in gold.
The picture I may keep. O ! that his face
Were smiling so serenely beautiful,
So like an angel's now !—O sacred ring !
Which I did hope to wear within the tomb,
I give thee to the poor. So may their prayers
Save him from death for whose delightful sake
With bliss I wore it, and with hope resign.
Here, take them all, thou steward of the poor ;
Stern as thou art, thou art a holy man !
I do believe thou art a holy man.

Astrologer. Lady, thou need'st this wedding-ring no
more !

Death with his lean and bony hand hath loosen'd
The bauble from thy finger, and even now
Thy husband is a corpse. , O ! might I say
Thy beauty were immortal ! But a ghost,
In all the loveliness on earth it wore,
Walks through the moonlight of the cemetery,
And I know the shadow of the mortal creature
Now weeping at my side.

*Enter FRANKFORT and WILMOT close to the
Astrologer.*

Frank. Amelia !

Lady. Ah me ! whose soft kind voice is that I hear ?

Frank. Frankfort ! the playmate of thy infancy,
The brother of thy womanhood, the friend
Of thy dear husband, and the godfather
Of thy sweet twins, heaven shield their innocence !

Lady. My babes are with their Saviour, and my
husband
Has gone with them to heaven. Lead, lead me hence !
For the seer's stern and scowling countenance
Is more than I can bear.

Frank. O grief ! to think
That one so dear to heaven, by Christ beloved
For a still life of perfect sinlessness,
Should, in such sad delusion, court the ban
Of this most savage liar, sporting thus
With the broken spirit of humanity.

Astrologer. Welcome to London, storm-beat ma-
riners !

The city is in masquerade to-day,
And, in good truth, the Plague doth celebrate
A daily festival, with many a dance
Fantastic, and unusual melody,

That may not suit your ears, accustom'd long
To the glad sea-breeze, and the rousing airs
Of martial music on your armed decks.

Frank. to Wil. Is this some wild enthusiast, whom
the times

Have sent unto the light, deluding others
By his own strong delusions, or some fiend,
Thirsting for gold even in the very grave ?

Wil. With what a cruel face he looks at us !

Frank. If an impostor in the shadow of death
Endangering thus thy soul, vile wretch ! come down
From thy tribunal built upon the fears
Of agony, lest in thy seat of guile
The Pest may smite thee ! Lean on me, Amelia !

Astrologer. Scoff not at God's own delegate, Harry
Frankfort !

What though the burning fever of the west
Hath spared thy bronzed face and stately form,
A mightier Power is here ; and he may smile,
Ere the sun go down, upon thy bloated corpse.
Not thus the maiden whom her sailor loves
Despised me and my prophecies. Magdalenc,
In snow-white raiment, like a maid that walk'd
At the funeral of a maiden, she stood there,
Even on the very stones beneath your feet,

And ask'd of me her doom ; but on this earth
Thy Magdalene's beauty must be seen no more.

Frank. to Wil. The maid of whom he speaks lives
far remote.

In her father's cottage, near a silent lake
Among the hills of Westmoreland, she breathes,
Happy and well, her own sweet mountain air.
Methinks I know his face. That harden'd eye.
Gleams through the dimness of my memory,
I know not when nor where. Amelia, come,
And I will lead thee home. I hear the crowd
Saying that thy husband is alive : may heaven
For many a year preserve you to each other.
Say, is my mother living ?

Lady. God forgive me,
As I hope for my friend's forgiveness !
I know not if she lives ; for, oh ! this Plague
Hath spread an universal selfishness,
And each house in its own calamity
Stands single, shut from human fellowship
By sullen misery and heart-withering fear.

Voice from the crowd. Look at the sorcerer ! how
his countenance
Is fallen !—'tis distorted horribly !
A shadow comes across it, like a squall
Dark'ning the sea.

Another voice. Even thus I saw a man
This very morning stricken by the Plague,
And in three hours he was a ghost. Disperse,
All ye who prize your lives ! soon will the air
Be foul with his dead body. Let us away !

[*The crowd disperse.*]

Astrologer. God's hand is on me. In my cruel guilt
I perish. Frankfort, I have never seen
Magdalene, the maid thou lovest. Look at me ;
Dost not remember Francis Bannerman
On board the Thunderer ?

Frank. Pardon to thy soul !
Thou mad abuser of the gifts of heaven.

Astrologer. Oh ! I am sick to death : my soul hath
sunk
At once into despair.

Wil. What dreadful groans !—
O fatal is the blast of misery,
When it hath forced its way into the soul
Of harden'd cruelty ! As when a storm
Hath burst the gates of a thick-ribbed hold,
And all its gloomy dungeons, in one moment,
Are roaring like a hundred cataracts.

Astrologer. I have shed blood. Roll, roll, ye moun-
tain waves,
Above that merciless ghost that walks the sea

After our ship for ever ! Shut thine eyes,
Those glaring, bloodshot, those avenging eyes,
And I will bear to feel thy skeleton-arms
Twined round my heart, so that those eyes be shut !
A ghost's wild eyes, that nothing can behold
But the frighten'd aspect of its murderer !
Unconscious they of ocean, air, and Heaven,
But fix'd eternally, like hideous stars,
On a shrieking soul whom guilt hath doom'd to Hell !

Frank. to Wil. The murderer is raving of his crime.

Astrologer. Ha ! ha ! 'tis set within the ebb of flood
Fifty feet high ; and the iron'd criminal
With a frantic face stands dumb upon the scaffold.
The priest is singing psalms !—Curst be the eyes
That see such idle show—'tis all gone by !
I fear not Hell, if that eternal Shape
Meet me not there ! Pray, pray not for me, Frankfort,
For I am deliver'd over to despair,
And holy words are nought but mockery
To him who knows that he must dwell for ever
In regions darken'd by the wrath of God.

Lady. Let us leave this horrid scene !

Astrologer. O might I hear
That sweet voice breathing of forgiveness !
Hush ! hush ! a voice once breath'd upon this earth
That would have pleaded not in vain to Heaven,

Even for a fiend like me. Thou art in Heaven,
And knowest all thy husband's wickedness ;
So hide thy pitying eyes, and let me sink
Without thy intercession to the depths
Of unimagined woe !—O Christ ! I die.

Frank. Most miserable end ! an evil man
Prostrating by a savage eloquence
The spirits of the wretched—so that he
Might riot on the bare necessities
Of man's expiring nature—on the spoil
Of the unburied dead ! Most atheist-like !
I know not how I can implore the grace
Of God unto thy soul !

Astrologer.

Eternal doom !

The realms of Hell are gleaming fiery bright.
What ghastly faces !—Christ, have mercy on me !

Lady. Wilt thou not lead me away, for I am blind !
O Frankfort, come with me—the Plague hath struck
My husband into madness—and I fear him !
O God ! I fear the man whom I do love !

Frank. All—all are wretched—guilty—dead or
dying ;

And all the wild and direful images
That crowd, and wail, and blacken round my soul,
Have reconciled me to the misery
Sent from my mother's grave. An hour of respite

Is granted me while I conduct thee home :
Then will I seek that grave, and, 'mid the tumult
Of this perturbed city, sit and listen
To a voice that in my noiseless memory
Sings like an angel.

Lady. She is yet alive !

Frank. Thy voice is like the voice of Hope—Sweet
friend,
Be cheer'd, nor tremble so—for God is with us.

SCENE III.

*A Churchyard. Two Females in mourning dresses
sitting on a Tombstone.*

1st Lady. The door of the Cathedral is left open.
Perhaps some one within is at the altar
Offering up thanks, or supplicating heaven
To save a husband dying of the Plague.
If so, I join a widow's prayer to hers,
Sitting on my husband's grave.

2d Lady. One moment hush !
Methought I heard a footstep in the church,
As of one walking softly up the chancel.

List—list ! I am not dreaming of a strain
Of heavenly music ? 'Tis a hymn of praise.

[*A voice is heard singing in the Cathedral.*]

1st Lady. A voice so heavenly sweet I once did hear
Singing at night close to my bed, when I
Was beyond hope recovering from the Plague.
That voice hymn'd in my sleep, and was a dream
Framed by my soul returning into life,
A strain that murmur'd from another world.
But this is earthly music : she must have
An angel's face who through the echoing aisle
So like an angel sings.

2d Lady. I know that voice !
Last Sabbath evening, sitting on this stone,
And thinking who it was that lay below it,
I heard that very music faint and far,
Deaden'd almost into silence by the weight
Of those thick walls. I listen'd with my heart
That I might hear the dirge-like air again.
But it did rise no more, and I believed
'Twas some sweet fancy of my sorrowful soul,
Or wandering breath of evening through the pillars
Of the Cathedral sighing wildly by.

1st Lady. And saw'st thou no one ?

2d Lady. Yes ; I gently stole
Into the solemn twilight of the church,

And looking towards the altar, there I saw
A white-robed Being on her knees. At first
I felt such awe as I had seen a spirit,
When, rising from the attitude of prayer,
The vision softly glided down the steps,
And then her eyes met mine. But such sweet eyes,
So fill'd with human sadness, yet so bright
Even through their tears with a celestial joy,
Ne'er shone before on earth. Even such methought
The Virgin-Mother's holy countenance,
When, turning from her Son upon the cross,
A gleam of heavenly comfort cheer'd the darkness
Of her disconsolate soul ! At once I knew
That I was looking on the Maid divine
Whom the sad city bless'd—whose form arises
Beside the bed of death by all deserted,
And to the dim eyes of the dying man
Appears an angel sent from pitying heaven
To bid him part in peace. I could have dropt
Down on my knees and worshipp'd her, but silent
As a gleam of light the creature glided by me,
And ere my soul recover'd she was gone.

1st Lady. How weak and low does virtue such as
hers
Make us poor beings feel !

2d Lady. Yet she is one

Of frail and erring mortals, and she knew not
In other days, to what a lofty pitch
Her gentle soul could soar. For I have heard
She was an only child, and in the light
Of her fond parents' love was fostered,
Like a flower that blooms best shelter'd in the house,
And only placed beneath the open air
In hours of sunshine.

1st Lady. Could we now behold
The glorious Being ?

2d Lady. No ; this hour is sacred :
We must not interrupt her. The dew falls
Heavy and chill, and thou art scarce recover'd
From that long sickness—Let me kiss thee thus,
Thou cold wet stone,—thou loveliest, saddest name,
Ever engraven on a monument.

[*The scene changes to the interior of the Cathedral, MAGDALENE discovered on her knees at the altar.*]

Magdalene. Father of mercies ! may I lift mine eyes
From the holy ground that I have wet with tears.
Unto the silence of the moonlight heavens
That shine above me with a smile of love,
Forgiveness, and compassion. There Thou art !
Enthroned in glory and omnipotence !
Yet from thy dwelling 'mid the eternal stars,
Encircled by the hymning seraphim,

Thou dost look down upon our mortal earth,
And seest this weeping creature on her knees,
And hear'st the beatings of her lonely heart.
If, in my days of sinless infancy,
My innocence found favour in thy sight ;
If in my youth,—and yet I am but young,—
I strove to walk according to thy will,
And revered my Bible, and did weep,
Thinking of him who died upon the cross ;
If, in their old age, I did strive to make
My parents happy, and received at last
Their benediction on the bed of death—
Oh ! let me walk the waves of this wild world
Through faith unsinking ;—stretch thy saving hand
To a lone castaway upon the sea,
Who hopes no resting-place except in heaven.
And oh ! this holy calm,—this peace profound,—
That sky so glorious in infinitude,—
That countless host of softly-burning stars,
And all that floating universe of light,
Lift up my spirit far above the grave,
And tell me that my pray'rs are heard in Heaven.
I feel th' Omnipotent is Merciful !

[*A voice exclaims from an unseen person.*]

O were my name remember'd in thy prayers !

Magd. (*rising from her knees.*) Did some one speak?

Voice.

A sinful wretch implores

That thou wilt stand between him and the wrath
Of an offended God.

Magd. Come to the altar.

[*A man advances from behind a pillar, and kneels
down at the altar.*]

Stranger. I fear I cannot pray. My wicked heart,
Long unaccustom'd to these bended knees,
Feels not the worship that my limbs would offer ;
—My lot is cast in hell.

Magd. Repentance finds
The blackest gulf in the wild soul of sin,
And calms the tumult there, even as our Lord
With holy hand did hush the howling sea.

Stranger. Lady ! I am too near thy blessed side ;
The breath of such a saint ought not to fall
Into the hard heart of a murderer.

Magd. Hast thou come here to murder me ?

Stranger. Behold
This dagger.

Magd. Then the will of God be done !

Stranger. Rather than hurt one of those loveliest
hairs
That braided round thy pale, thy fearless brow,
Do make thee seem an Angel or a Spirit
At night come down from heaven, would I for ever
Live in the dark corruption of the grave.

Magd. My heart is beating—but I fear thee not—
Thou wilt not murder me ?

Stranger. What need'st thou fear ?
Kneeling in those white robes, so like a Spirit,
With face too beautiful for tears to stain,
Eyes meekly raised to heaven, and snow-white hands
Devoutly folded o'er a breast that moves
In silent adoration——what hast thou
To fear from man or fiend ? O rise not up !
So Angel-like thou seem'st upon thy knees,
Even I can hope, while thou art at thy prayers.

Magd. If thou cam'st hither to unload thy soul,
Kneel down.

Stranger. I hither came to murder thee.
With silent foot I traced thee to this church,
And there, beyond that pillar, took my stand,
That I might rush upon thee at the altar,
And kill thee at thy prayers. I grasp'd the knife—
When suddenly thy melancholy voice
Began that low wild hymn !—I could not move ;
The holy music made thee seem immortal !
And when I dared to look towards thy face,
The moonlight fell upon it, and I saw
A smile of such majestic innocence,
That long-lost pity to my soul return'd,
And I knelt down and wept.

Magd. What made thee think
Of killing one who never injured thee ?

Stranger. Th' accurs'd love of gold.

Magd. Hath Poverty
Blinded thy soul, and driven thee forth a prey
To Sin, who loves the gaunt and hollow cheeks
Of miserable men ? Perhaps a cell
Holds thy sick wife——

Stranger. No ! I have sold my soul
Unto the Evil One, nor even can'st Thou,
With all the music of that heavenly voice,
Charm the stern ear of hell.

Magd. Alas ! poor wretch !
What shakes thee so ?

Stranger. 'Mid all the ghastly shrieking,
Black sullen dumbness, and wild-staring frenzy,
Pain madly leaping out of life, or fetter'd
By burning irons to its house of clay,
Where think you Satan drove me ? To the haunts
Of riot, lust, and reckless blasphemy.
In spite of that eternal passing-bell,
And all the ghosts that hourly flock'd in troops
Unto the satiated grave, insane
With drunken guilt, I mock'd my Saviour's name
With hideous mummeries, and the holy book
In scornful fury trampled, rent, and burn'd.

Oh ! ours were dreadful orgies !—At still midnight
We sallied out, in mimic grave-clothes clad,
Aping the dead, and in some church-yard danced
A dance that ofttimes had a mortal close.
Then would we lay a living Body out,
As it had been a corpse, and bear it slowly
With what at distance seem'd a holy dirge,
Through silent streets and squares unto its rest.
One quaintly apparell'd like a surpliced priest
Led the procession, joining in the song ;—
A jestful song, most brutal and obscene,
Shameful to man, his Saviour, and his God.
Or in a hearse we sat, which one did drive
In masquerade habiliments of death ;
And in that ghastly chariot whirl'd along,
With oaths, and songs, and shouts, and peals of laughter,
Till sometimes that most devilish merriment
Chill'd our own souls with horror, and we stared
Upon each other all at once struck dumb.

Magd. Madness ! 'twas madness all.

Stranger.

Oh ! that it were !

But, lady ! were we mad when we partook
Of what we call'd a sacrament ?

Magd.

Hush ! hush !—

Stranger. Yes—I will utter it—we brake the bread,
And wine pour'd out, and jesting ate and drank
Perdition to our souls. ,

Magd. And women too,
Did they blaspheme their Saviour ?

Stranger. Ay ! there sat
Round that unhallow'd table beautiful creatures,
Who seem'd to feel a fiend-like happiness
In tempting us wild wretches to blaspheme.
Sweet voices had they, though of broken tones ;
Their faces fair, though waxing suddenly
Whiter than ashes ; smiles were in their eyes,
Though often in their mirth they upwards look'd,
And wept ; nor, when they tore distractedly
The garments from their bosoms, could our souls
Sustain the beauty heaving in our sight
With grief, remorse, despair, and agony.
We knew that we were lost, yet would we pluck
The flowers that bloom'd upon the crater's edge,
Nor fear'd the yawning gulf.

Magd. Why art thou here ?

Stranger. Riot hath made us miserably poor,
And gold we needs must have. I heard a whisper
Tempting me to murder, and thy very name
Distinctly syllabled. In vain I strove
Against the Tempter—bent was I on blood !

But here I stand in hopeless penitence,
Nor even implore thy prayers—my doom is seal'd.

[*He flings himself down before the altar.*]

Magd. Poor wretch ! I leave thee to the grace of
God.—

Ah me ! how calmly and serenely smile
Those pictured saints upon the holy wall,
Tinged by that sudden moonlight ! That meek face
How like my mother's ! So she wore her veil ;
Even so her braided hair !—Ye blessed spirits,
Look down upon your daughter in her trouble,
For I am sick at heart. The moonlight dies—
I feel afraid of darkness. Wretched man,
Hast thou found comfort ? Groans his sole reply.—
I must away to that sad Funeral.

SCENE IV.

The Street.—A long table covered with glasses.—A party of young men and women carousing.

Young Man. I rise to give, most noble President,
The memory of a man well known to all,
Who by keen jest, and merry anecdote,
Sharp repartee, and humorous remark

Most biting in its solemn gravity,
Much cheer'd our out-door table, and dispell'd
The fogs which this rude visitor the Plague
Oft breathed across the brightest intellect.
But two days past, our ready laughter chased
His various stories ; and it cannot be
That we have in our gamesome revelries
Forgotten Harry Wentworth. His chair stands
Empty at your right hand—as if expecting
That jovial wassailer—but he is gone
Into cold narrow quarters. Well, I deem
The grave did never silence with its dust
A tongue more eloquent ; but since 'tis so,
And store of boon companions yet survive,
There is no reason to be sorrowful ;
Therefore let us drink unto his memory
With acclamation, and a merry peal
Such as in life he loved.

Master of Revels. 'Tis the first death
Hath been amongst us, therefore let us drink
His memory in silence.

Young Man. Be it so.

[*They all rise, and drink their glasses in silence.*]

Master of Revels. Sweet Mary Gray ! Thou hast a
silver voice,
And wildly to thy native melodies

Can tune its flute-like breath—sing us a song,
And let it be, even mid our merriment,
Most sad, most slow, that when its music dies,
We may address ourselves to revelry,
More passionate from the calm, as men leap up
To this world's business from some heavenly dream.

MARY GRAY'S SONG.

I walk'd by mysel' ower the sweet braces o' Yarrow,
When the earth wi' the gowans o' July was drest ;
But the sang o' the bonny burn sounded like sorrow,
Round ilka house cauld as a last simmer's nest.

I look'd through the lift o' the blue smiling morning,
But never ae wee cloud o' mist could I see
On its way up to heaven, the cottage adorning,
Hanging white ower the green o' its sheltering tree.

By the outside I ken'd that the inn was forsaken,
That nae tread o' footsteps was heard on the floor ;
—O loud craw'd the cock where was nane to awaken,
And the wild-raven croak'd on the seat by the door !

Sic silence—sic lonesomeness, oh, were bewildering !
I heard nae lass singing when herding her sheep ;
I met nae bright garlands o' wee rosy children
Dancing on to the school-house just waken'd frae sleep.

I pass'd by the school-house—when strangers were coming,
Whose windows with glad faces seem'd all alive ;
Ae moment I hearken'd, but heard nae sweet humming,
For a night o' dark vapour can silence the hive.

I pass'd by the pool where the lasses at daw'ing
Used to bleach their white garments wi' daffin and din ;
But the foam in the silence o' nature was fa'ing,
And nae laughing rose loud through the roar of the linn.

I gaed into a small town—when sick o' my roaming—
Whare ance play'd the viol, the tabor, and flute ;
'Twas the hour loved by Labour, the saft smiling gloaming,
Yet the green round the Cross-stane was empty and mute.

To the yellow-flower'd meadow, and scant rigs o' tillage,
The sheep a' neglected had come frae the glen ;
The cushat-dow coo'd in the midst o' the village,
And the swallow had flown to the dwellings o' men !

—Sweet Denholm ! not thus, when I lived in thy bosom,
Thy heart lay so still the last night o' the week ;
Then nane was sae weary that love would nae rouse him,
And Grief gaed to dance with a laugh on his cheek.

Sic thoughts wet my een—as the moonshine was beaming
On the kirk-tower that rose up sae silent and white ;
The wan ghastly light on the dial was streaming,
But the still finger tauld not the hour of the night.

The mirk-time pass'd slowly in sighing and weeping,
I waken'd, and nature lay silent in mirth ;
Ower a' holy Scotland the Sabbath was sleeping,
And Heaven in beauty came down on the earth.

The morning smiled on—but nae kirk-bell was ringing,
Nae plaid or blue bonnet came down frae the hill ;
The kirk-door was shut, but nae psalm tune was singing,
And I miss'd the wee voices sae sweet and sae shrill.

I look'd ower the quiet o' Death's empty dwelling,
The lav'rock walk'd mute 'mid the sorrowful scene,
And fifty brown hillocks wi' fresh mould were swelling
Ower the kirk-yard o' Denholm, last simmer sae green.

The infant had died at the breast o' its mither ;
The cradle stood still at the mitherless bed ;
At play the bairn sunk in the hand o' its brither ;
At the fauld on the mountain the shepherd lay dead.

Oh ! in spring-time 'tis eerie, when winter is over,
And birds should be glinting ower forest and lea,
When the lint-white and mavis the yellow leaves cover,
And nae blackbird sings loud frae the tap o' his tree.

But eerier far, when the spring-land rejoices,
And laughs back to heaven with gratitude bright,
To hearken ! and naewhere hear sweet human voices !
When man's soul is dark in the season o' light !

Master of Revels. We thank thee, sweet one ! for
thy mournful song.

It seems, in the olden time, this very Plague
Visited thy hills and valleys, and the voice
Of lamentation wail'd along the streams
That now flow on through their wild paradise,
Murmuring their songs of joy. All that survive
In memory of that melancholy year,
When died so many brave and beautiful,
Are some sweet mournful airs, some shepherd's lay
Most touching in simplicity, and none
Fitter to make one sad amid his mirth
Than the tune yet faintly singing through our souls.

Mary Gray. O ! that I ne'er had sung it but at home
Unto my aged parents ! to whose ear
Their Mary's tones were always musical.
I hear my own self singing o'er the moor,
Beside my native cottage,—most unlike
The voice which Edward Walsingham has praised,
It is the angel-voice of innocence.

2d Woman. I thought this cant were out of fashion
now.

But it is well ; there are some simple souls,
Even yet, who melt at a frail maiden's tears,
And give her credit for sincerity.
She thinks her eyes quite killing while she weeps.

Thought she as well of smiles, her lips would pout
With a perpetual simper. Walsingham
Hath praised these crying beauties of the north,
So whimpering is the fashion. How I hate
The dim dull yellow of that Scottish hair !

Master of Revels. Hush ! hush !—is that the sound
of wheels I hear ?

[*The Dead-cart passes by, driven by a Negro.*

Ha ! dost thou faint, Louisa ! one had thought
That railing tongue bespoke a mannish heart.
But so it ever is. The violent
Are weaker than the mild, and abject fear
Dwells in the heart of passion. Mary Gray,
Throw water on her face. She now revives.

Mary Gray. O sister of my sorrow and my shame !
Lean on my bosom. Sick must be your heart
After a fainting-fit so like to death.

Louisa, (recovering.) I saw a horrid demon in my
dream !

With sable visage and white-glaring eyes,
He beckon'd on me to ascend a cart
Fill'd with dead bodies, muttering all the while
An unknown language of most dreadful sounds.
What matters it ? I see it was a dream.
—Pray, did the dead-cart pass ?

Young Man.

Come, brighten up.

Louisa ! Though this street be all our own,
 A silent street that we from death have rented,
 Where we may hold our orgies undisturb'd,
 You know those rumbling wheels are privileged,
 And we must bide the nuisance. Walsingham,
 To put an end to bickering, and these fits
 Of fainting that proceed from female vapours,
 Give us a song ;—a free and gladsome song ;
 None of those Scottish ditties framed of sighs,
 But a true English Bacchanalian song,
 By toper chaunted o'er the flowing bowl.

Master of Revels. I have none such ; but I will sing
 a song

Upon the Plague. I made the words last night,
 After we parted : a strange rhyming-fit
 Fell on me ; 'twas the first time in my life.
 But you shall have it, though my vile crack'd voice
 Won't mend the matter much.

Many voices. A song on the Plague !
 A song on the Plague ! Let's have it ! bravo ! bravo !

'SONG.

Two navies meet upon the waves
 That round them yawn like op'ning graves ;
 The battle rages ; seamen fall,
 And overboard go one and all !

The wounded with the dead are gone ;
But Ocean drowns each frantic groan,
And, at each plunge into the flood,
Grimly the billow laughs with blood.
—Then, what although our Plague destroy
Seaman and landman, woman, boy ?
When the pillow rests beneath the head,
Like sleep he comes, and strikes us dead,
What though into yon Pit we go,
Descending fast, as flakes of snow ?
What matters body without breath ?
No groan disturbs that hold of death.

CHORUS.

*Then, leaning on this snow-white breast,
I sing the praises of the Pest !
If me thou would'st this night destroy,
Come, smite me in the arms of Joy.*

Two armies meet upon the hill ;
They part, and all again is still.
No ! thrice ten thousand men are lying,
Of cold, and thirst, and hunger dying.
While the wounded soldier rests his head
About to die upon the dead,
What shrieks salute yon dawning light ?
'Tis Fire that comes to aid the Fight !
—All whom our Plague destroys by day,
His chariot drives by night away ;

And sometimes o'er a churchyard wall
His banner hangs, a sable pall !
Where in the light by Hecate shed
With grisly smile he counts the dead,
And piles them up a trophy high
In honour of his victory.

Then, leaning, &c.

King of the aisle ! and churchyard cell !
Thy regal robes become thee well.
With yellow spots, like lurid stars
Prophetic of throne-shattering wars,
Bespangled is its night-like gloom,
As it sweeps the cold damp from the tomb.
Thy hand doth grasp no needless dart,
One finger-touch benumbs the heart.
If thy stubborn victim will not die,
Thou roll'st around thy bloodshot eye,
And Madness leaping in his chain
With giant buffet smites the brain,
Or Idiocy with drivelling laugh
Holds out her strong-drugg'd bowl to quaff,
And down the drunken wretch doth lie
Unsheeted in the cemetery.

, Then, leaning, &c.

Thou ! Spirit of the burning breath,
Alone deservest the name of Death !
Hide, Fever ! hide thy scarlet brow ;
Nine days thou linger'st o'er thy blow,

Till the leach bring water from the spring,
And scare thee off on drenched wing.
Consumption ! waste away at will !
In warmer climes thou fail'st to kill,
And rosy Health is laughing loud
As off thou steal'st with empty shroud !
Ha ! blundering Palsy ! thou art chill !
But half the man is living still ;
One arm, one leg, one cheek, one side
In antic guise thy wrath deride.
But who may 'gainst thy power rebel,
King of the aisle ! and churchyard cell !

Then, leaning, &c.

To Thee, O Plague ! I pour my song,
Since thou art come I wish thee long !
Thou strikest the lawyer 'mid his lies,
The priest 'mid his hypocrisies.
The miser sickens at his hoard,
And the gold leaps to its rightful lord.
The husband, now no longer tied,
May wed a new and blushing bride,
And many a widow slyly weeps
O'er the grave where her old dotard sleeps,
While love shines through her moisten'd eye
On yon tall stripling gliding by.
'Tis ours who bloom in vernal years
To dry the love-sick maiden's tears,
Who turning from the relics cold,
In a new swain forgets the old.

Then, leaning, &c.

Enter an old grey-headed Priest.

Priest. O impious table ! spread by impious hands !
Mocking with feast and song and revelry
The silent air of death that hangs above it,
A canopy more dismal than the Pall !
Amid the churchyard darkness as I stood
Beside a dire interment, circled round
By the white ghastly faces of despair,
That hideous merriment disturb'd the grave,
And with a sacrilegious violence
Shook down the crumbling earth upon the bodies
Of the unsheeted dead. But that the prayers
Of holy age and female piety
Did sanctify that wide and common grave,
I could have thought that hell's exulting fiends
With shouts of devilish laughter dragg'd away
Some harden'd atheist's soul unto perdition.

Several Voices. How well he talks of hell ! Go on,
old boy !

The devil pays his tithes—yet he abuses him.

Priest. Cease, I conjure you, by the blessed blood
Of Him who died for us upon the Cross,
These most unnatural orgies. As ye hope
To meet in heaven the souls of them ye loved,
Destroy'd so mournfully before your eyes,
Unto your homes depart.

Master of Revels. Our homes are dull—
And youth loves mirth.

Priest. O, Edward Walsingham !
Art thou that groaning pale-faced man of tears
Who three weeks since knelt by thy mother's corpse,
And kiss'd the soldier'd coffin, and leapt down
With rage-like grief into the burial vault,
Crying upon its stone to cover thee
From this dim darken'd world ? Would she not weep,
Weep even in heaven, could she behold her son
Presiding o'er unholy revellers,
And tuning that sweet voice to frantic songs
That should ascend unto the throne of grace
'Mid sob-broken words of prayer !

Young Man. Why ! we can pray
Without a priest—pray long and fervently
Over the brimming bowl. Hand him a glass.

Master of Revels. Treat his grey hairs with reverence.

Priest. Wretched boy !
This white head must not sue to thee in vain !
Come with the guardian of thy infancy,
And by the hymns and psalms of holy men
Lamenting for their sins, we will assuage
This fearful mirth akin to agony,
And in its stead, serene as the hush'd face
Of thy dear sainted parent, kindle hope
And heavenly resignation. Come with me.

Young Man. They have a design against the hundredth
Psalm.

Oh ! Walsingham will murder cruelly

“ All people that on earth do dwell.”

Suppose we sing it here—I know the drawl.

Master of Revels, (silencing him, and addressing the Priest.) Why camest thou hither to disturb me thus ?

I may not, must not go ! Here am I held

By hopelessness in dark futurity,

By dire remembrance of the past,—by hatred

And deep contempt of my own worthless self,—

By fear and horror of the lifelessness

That reigns throughout my dwelling,—by the new

And frantic love of loud-tongued revelry,—

By the blest poison mantling in this bowl,—

And, help me Heaven ! by the soft balmy kisses

Of this lost creature, lost, but beautiful

Even in her sin ; nor could my mother's ghost

Frighten me from this fair bosom. 'Tis too late !

I hear thy warning voice—I know it strives

To save me from perdition, body and soul.

Beloved old man, go thy way in peace,

But curst be these feet if they do follow thee.

Several Voices. Bravo ! bravissimo ! Our noble pre-
sident !

Done with that sermonizing—off—off—off !

Priest. Matilda's sainted spirit calls on thee !

Master of Revels, (starting distractedly from his seat.)

Didst thou not swear, with thy pale wither'd hands

Lifted to Heaven, to let that doleful name

Lie silent in the tomb for evermore ?

O that a wall of darkness hid this sight

From her immortal eyes ! She, my betrothed,

Once thought my spirit lofty, pure, and free,

And on my bosom felt herself in Heaven.

What am I now ? (*looking up*)—O holy child of light,

I see thee sitting where my fallen nature

Can never hope to soar !

Female Voice. The fit is on him.

Fool ! thus to rave about a buried wife !

See ! how his eyes are fix'd.

Master of Revels. Most glorious star !

Thou art the spirit of that bright Innocent !

And there thou shinest with upbraiding beauty

On him whose soul hath thrown at last away

Not the hope only, but the wish of Heaven.

Priest. Come, Walsingham !

Master of Revels. O holy father ! go.

For mercy's sake, leave me to my despair.

Priest. Heaven pity my dear son. Farewell ! farewell !

[*The Priest walks mournfully away.*

Young Man. Sing him another song. See how he turns
His eyes from yon far Heaven to Mary's bosom !

The man's in love. Ho ! Walsingham ! what cheer ?

Master of Revels, (angrily.) I hate that Irish slang—
it grates my soul.

Mary Gray. O Walsingham ! I fear to touch the
breast

Where one so pure has lain ! Yet turn thine eyes
Towards me, a sinful creature, that thy soul
May lose the sight of that celestial phantom,
Whose beauty is a torment. List to me.

Master of Revels. Here, Mary ! with a calm deli-
berate soul

I swear to love thee ! with such love, sweet girl !
As a man sunk in utter wretchedness
May cherish for a daughter of despair.
O maudlin fools ! who preach of Chastity,
And call her Queen of Virtues ! In the breast
Even of this prostitute, (why should I fear
That word of three unmeaning syllables ?)
In spite of all that's whisper'd from the grave,
I now will seek, and seeking I will find
The open-eyed sleep of troubled happiness.

Mary Gray. All names are one to me. I often love
The imprecations of brutality,

Because, with vain contrition for my sins,
I feel that I deserve them all. But thou . . .
Killest me with thy pitying gentleness,
Wasting sweet looks, and words of amity,
On a polluted creature drench'd in shame.

Young Man. Had yon old dotard, with his surplice on,
Emblem of his pretended sanctity,
And sanctimonious visage common to all
The hypocritic brotherhood of priests,
Staid but a little longer, I had read him
A lecture on the Christian's outward creed.
This is rare season for the jugglery
Of these church-mountebanks !

Master of Revels. Fool ! hold thy peace !
Thou in thy heart hast said there is no God,
Yet knowest thyself—a liar.

Young Man, (starting up furiously.) On his knees,
Upon his knees must Edward Walsingham
Implore forgiveness for these villainous words,
Or through his heart this sword will find a passage,
Even swifter than the Plague.

Master of Revels. Upon my knees !
Fierce gladiator ! dost thou think to daunt me
By that red rapier reeking with the blood
Of nerveless, hot-brain'd, inexperienced boys,

Whom thou hast murder'd ? Stand upon thy guard,
And see if all the skill of fencing France,
Or thy Italian practice, cowardly bravo !
Can ward this flash of lightning from thine eyes.

Enter FRANKFORT and WILMOT, who rush between them.

Frank. Madmen ! put up your swords. What, Walsingham !

The Captain of the Ocean Queen, engaged
In brawls on shore.

Master of Revels. Ay ! 'tis a foolish quarrel,
And may have foolish ending : But he spake
With rude licentious tongue irreverently
Of a white head that since my mother's death
Hath been to me the holiest thing on earth ;
And woe ! to its blasphemers.

Young Man whispers. St Martin's Fields,
At twelve o'clock. There is good moonlight for us.

Master of Revels. 'Tis a right hour. I'll meet thee
at the elm-tree

Named from the royal deer. At twelve o'clock !

[*The party breaks up.*

What news from sea ?

Frank.

All well.

Master of Revels.

Why look so pale ?

Before an action fearless men look pale,
And fling away their smiles ; but, once engaged,
They scoff at 'death with gleesome mockery.
No deck was e'er so strew'd with hideous slaughter,
As the wide floor of this Plague-conquer'd city,
Therefore look up—our colours still are flying—
Will Frankfort strike them ?

Frank.

Yes ! I am a coward !

I have for hours been wandering through this city,
And now I stand within a little furlong
Of the house that was my mother's. I have linger'd
In places quite remote—have traversed streets
That led not thither—yea ! I have turn'd my face
Away from the imaged dwelling of my parent,
Glad to put off the moment that might tell me
That which with agony I long to know.
Besides, mayhap, I am intruding here.
Good evening, Walsingham—to you, fair dames.
Farewell.—Come, Wilmot, o'er yon roof I see
The vane upon the house-top, where——

Walsingham.

Your mother

On Thursday was alive.

Frank.

God bless thee, Walsingham !

On Thursday—and 'tis yet but Sabbath-night.

She must be living still ! Said they that the Plague
Destroys so suddenly ? In three small hours ?
Three days and nights contain a frightful sum
Of fatal hours. The Plague doth ask but three—
She may be sick—dead—buried—and forgotten.

END OF THE FIRST ACT.

ACT II.

SCENE I.

The street opposite a house adjoining Aldgate church-yard.

Frank. Hush, Wilmot! while I say one little prayer.
There stands the house—I see it in my soul,
Though yet mine eyes dare not to look on it.
—Let me lean on thee—hear'st thou aught within?

Wil. It is the hour of rest: I nothing hear;
But the house, methinks, is slumbering happily
In the clear moonlight. 'Tis a lovely night,
Beauty without these walls, and peace within.

Frank. Wears it the look of a deserted dwelling?

Wil. Its silence seems of sleep and not of death.

Frank. O Wilmot! sure the moon shines ruefully,
On these black windows faintly tinged with light!
I see no difference between these dark walls,
And yonder tomb-stones—they both speak of death.

Wil. Be comforted.

Frank. List! Wilmot! hear'st thou aught?

Metlinks it was my mother's voice within
Singing a dirge-like hymn. Hear'st thou a voice?

Wil. Grief mocks itself with fancied sounds like
these;

There was no voice.

Frank. O let it breathe again,
And all the world will seem alive to me.
—O God! the silence of this lifeless street,
Where all the human dwellings stand like tombs
Empty or fill'd with corpses, seems collected
Round this one house, whose shadowyglimmering walls
Bear down my soul in utter hopelessness.
Oh! 'tis a sad, sad wreck. Mark how the dust
Lies on th' untrodden steps! and yet I see
Footprints of one ascending. As I live,
I hear a footstep in my mother's chamber.
A light! a light! see where a light is moving
As from an apparition, through the house.

[*The door opens, and the Priest who appeared in
the first Act comes into the street.*]

Frank. Pale death is in his troubled countenance.
The house is falling from me, and the street
Is sinking down—down—down—I faint—Support me.

The Priest, (To WIL. while they support FRANK.)
At a sad hour the sailor hath return'd.
Would he were yet at sea!

Frank. I hear thy voice,
And know that I indeed am motherless.

Priest. Blessed are they who lived in the Lord,
And in the Lord did die.

Frank. Amen—amen !
Hath little William gone with her to Heaven ?

Priest. They died three hours apart. Methought I
saw
The angelical mother smiling up the sky
With that delightful infant on her breast,
More like a spirit that had come from Heaven
To waft away the child to Paradise,
Than a human soul departing from this earth.

Frank. Soaring in beauty to immortal bliss !
But away from him who held them in his heart,
An everlasting presence of delight
'Mid the dim dreary sea.

Priest. Weep, weep, my son,
I wish to see thee weep.

Frank. O, why should tear
Be shed unto the blest and beautiful
By us poor dwellers in the woeful shades
Of mortal being ?

Wil. Thou art deadly pale !
Be not ashamed to weep upon my breast.

I have seen thee weeping for that sweet child's sake,
When haply he was dancing in his mirth—

Frank. Dancing in his mirth! The lovely child is
dead.

All, all his innocent thoughts like rose-leaves scatter'd,
And his glad childhood nothing but a dream!
I feel his last kiss yet—(*weeping.*)

Wil. I also weep,
For I too am his brother, though his face
Was only vision'd sweetly in my soul
With its small features——

Frank. Sudden happiness
Comes o'er my grief! Time and this world appear
Mere shadows, and I feel as if I stood
Close to my mother's side!—O mournful weakness!
The realms of Heaven are stretching far away;
My soul is fetter'd to the earth; the grave
Cries with a voice that may not be gainsay'd,
And mortal life appears eternity,
Since she I loved has perish'd.

Priest. Some, my son,
Would bid thee trust in time, the friend of sorrow;
But thou hast nobler comforters; nor would I
Bid thee place hope in blind forgetfulness.
I know that there is taken from thy soul

Something that must return no more—a joy
That from the shore breath'd on thee far at sea,
Filling thy heart with home ; and sweeter far
Arose that feeling o'er the ocean calm,
Than airs balsamic breathing through the ship
From odorous island unseen 'mid the waves.

Frank. O kind old man ! Thy sweet and solemn
voice,
Fit organ for such peaceful images,
Breathes a calm reconciliation through my soul.
These silvery locks made white by time and sorrow,
Yet in their reverend beauty meekly smiling
At what hath made them so, most silently
Inspire my heart, although yet young in grief,
With resignation almost like thine own.

Priest. Son ! hast thou strength to look upon that
sight,
Where human loveliness seems perfected
By the last smile that will not pass away ?

Frank. They yet then are unburied ?

Priest. Even this day,
At the hour when yonder bell would have been tolling,
In other times than these, for morning-service,
Her spirit went to heaven—your brother died
Some little hours before.

Frank. And in that house

My mother and her little son lie dead !
—Yes ! I have strength to look on them,—to kiss
Their cold white faces—to embrace their bodies
Though soul be gone still tenderly beloved,—
To gaze upon their eyelids, though the light
Must never break in beauty from below them,
And, with the words of fondest agony,
Softly to whisper love into the ear
That in its frozen silence hears me not.

Priest. I will conduct thee to them.

Frank.

At the hour

When she was dying, in our vessel's barge
Was I approaching to the shore,—the oars
Sounded as they were muffled on the black
And sluggish water ! 'Twas a gloomy hour,
Yet, dark as it was, I ne'er expected this.
One visit will I pay them ere I go.
Oh ! I have many a heavy thought to utter
Which God alone must hear.

Priest.

We will pray for thee,

Standing uncover'd in this silent street.
And when we think thy soul is satisfied
With the awful converse holden with the dead,
We will come to thee for a little while,
And sit with thee beside their bodies. God
Will not forsake thee in this last distress.

Frank. I dare not enter, though I yearn to lie
For ever by their side. The very beauty
Which in their sleeping faces I shall see
With its fair image holds me motionless.
A gulf of darkness lies beyond that door !
—O tell me, reverend father ! how they died,
And haply then I may have strength to go
And see them dead : Now 'tis impossible.
Wilnot ! why do you weep ?—be comforted.

Priest. Though from the awful suddenness of their
death

The Plague hath surely stricken them, yet they lie,
Unlike the other victims of that pest,
In more than mortal beauty. Their still faces,
When last I saw them, in the moonlight lay,
Like innocence sleeping in the love of heaven,
Love mix'd with pity. Though a smile was there,
It seem'd a smile ne'er meant for human eye,
Nor seem'd regarding me ; but there it shone
A mournful lustre, filling all the room
With the silence of its placid holiness.

Frank. Lovelier than when alive they might not be.
Tell how they died.

Priest. Last night I sat with her
And talk'd of thee ;—two tranquil hours we talk'd
Of thee and none beside, while little William

Sat in his sweet and timid silent way
Upon his stool beside his mother's knees,
And, sometimes looking upwards to her face,
Seem'd listening of his brother far at sea.
This morning early I look'd in upon them
Almost by chance. There little William lay
With his bright hair and rosy countenance
Dead ! though at first I thought he only slept.
" You think," his mother said, " that William sleeps !
But he is dead ! He sicken'd during the night,
And while I pray'd he drew a long deep sigh,
And breath'd no more !"

Frank. O sweet and sinless child !
Go on—go on !

Priest. I look'd on her who spake,
And I saw something in her tearless eyes
More than a mother's grief—the cold dull gleam
Of mortal sickness hastening to decay.
She ask'd me not to leave her, and I staid
Till human help or comfort by that saint
No more was needed. But a gentler death
A Christian never died. Methought her soul
Faded in light, even as a glorious star
Is hidden 'mid the splendours of the morn.

Frank. I hope she wept not long and bitterly
For her poor sailor's sake ? O cruel wind
That kept our ship last night far out at sea !

Priest. "In life I was most happy in my son,"
She said, "and none may know the happiness
His image yields me at the hour of death."
—I found that she had laid upon her bed
Many of those little presents that you brought her
From your first voyage to the Indies. Shells
With a sad lustre brighten'd o'er the whiteness
Of these her funeral sheets; and gorgeous feathers,
With which, few hours before, her child was playing,
And lisping all the while his brother's name,
Form'd a sad contrast with the pale, pale face
Lying so still beneath its auburn hair.
Two letters still are in her death-closed hand,
And will be buried with her. One was written
By your captain after the great victory
Over De Ruyter, and with loftiest praise
Of her son's consummate skill and gallantry
During the battle, told how he had saved
The lives of two young noble Hollanders,
By leaping overboard amid a storm.
The other, now almost effaced by tears,
Was from yourself, the last she had from you,
And spoke of your return. God bless thee, boy!
I am too old to weep—but such return
Wrings out the tears from my old wither'd heart.

Frank. O 'tis the curse of absence that our love
Becomes too sad—too tender—too profound

Towards all our far-off friends. Home we return,
And find them dead for whom we often wept,
Needlessly wept when they were in their joy !
Then goes the broken-hearted mariner
Back to the sea that welters drearily
Around the homeless earth !

Priest. Thy mother waits
Her son's approach—in beauty and in peace.

Frank. I go into her chamber—fear me not ;
I will not rush into the mournful presence
With frantic outcry, and with violent steps
Most unbecoming 'mid the hush of death.
But I, with footsteps gentle as the dew,
And with suspended breath, will reach her bed ;
There silent as she is, so will I be,
Lying beside my mother in her sleep
With my head upon her bosom—cold—cold—cold.

SCENE II.

*A little room in a lonely street in the suburbs.—ISABEL
sitting with the Bible on her knees.—Enter MAGDA-
LENE.*

Isabel. My gracious lady ! bless that face again !
Here have I sat this long, long wretched day

Quite by myself, until I thought with horror
You never might return.

Magd. O needless fears !
Sister ! thy anxious heart will never learn
To think more on thyself, and less on others.
Yet to thy friends thine are endearing faults,
And make thee loved the more.

Isabel. How pale you look !
Wearied, and pale, and languid—sit down here,
My gentle mistress ! Blest is charity
From ordinary hands, but sure from thine
It must drop on the children of the poor,
Like dew from heaven upon th' unconscious lambs.

Magd. I will sit down a while. I have been kept
From home, beyond my promis'd hour, by sad
And unexpected duty. Frankfort's mother,
And her sweet little son, this morning died.

Isabel. Both dead ! I might have known it from
that face.

Magd. I have prepared their bodies for the grave,
And with such flowers as in a desert square
Of the city I could gather, are they drest,
Sleeping together sound and silently.

Isabel. O what will that kind-hearted sailor think,
When he returns from sea !

Magd. I shudder for him,
His love was so profound

Isabel.

O matchless pair !

In love, in beauty, and in innocence
So long united, now your orphan hearts
Will closer cling in your calamity ;
As I have seen upon a leafless bough
Two young doves sitting silent, breast to breast.

Magd. Happy may he be for ever—may his ship
Linger in friendly port, or far at sea
Be chain'd in long, long calm, so that he comes not
Unto this City of the Plague ! He lives,
And long will live—that thought is happiness
Enough for me. I see him on the deck,
Walking and speaking——O good Isabel !
A bright and sunny vision often breaks
Upon my praying soul, even at the bed
Where death is busy, and with contrite heart
I strive to dim it : Angel-like it is,
But oh ! too dear in its humanity,
And, like a spirit lingering round a tomb,
It ever haunts my desolated bosom.

Isabel. Cherish that image—he will yet return
To live with thee for ever.

Magd.

Noble spirit !

I thought I lov'd him well when we were happy,
And liv'd together 'mid all happy things,
As of our bliss partaking. Death has come,

And in affection left us parentless ;
And now it seems that all the love I bore
My father and my mother has been pour'd
Into that mild, that brave, that generous heart.
Ay ! what will he say indeed when he returns !

Isabel. Thy parents both are dead—one month ago
They died before thine eyes ; yet where on earth
Might we behold a countenance array'd
In the light of an immortal happiness,
O Magdalene ! like to thine ?

Magd. Sometimes I fear
I have a stony heart.

Isabel. The hush thou feel'st
Will breathe through Frankfort's soul on his return,
And you will speak together of the dead
As of some gentle beings who have gone
To sojourn in a far-off happy land
Which one day ye will visit.

Magd. I know well
That they who love their friends most tenderly
Still bear their loss the best. There is in love
A consecrated power, that seems to wake
Only at the touch of death from its repose
In the profoundest depths of thinking souls.
Superior to the outward signs of grief,
Sighing, or tears,—when these have pass'd away,

It rises calm and beautiful, like the moon
Saddening the solemn night, yet with that sadness
Mingling the breath of undisturbed peace.

Isabel. With that sublime faith ye will both be happy.

Magd. How bright and fair that afternoon returns
When last we parted ! Even now I feel
Its dewy freshness in my soul. Sweet breeze !
That hymning like a spirit up the lake
Came through the tall pines on yon little isle
Across to us upon the vernal shore
With a kind friendly greeting. Frankfort blest
The unseen musician floating through the air,
And smiling said, “ Wild harper of the hill !
So may'st thou play that ditty when once more
This lake I do revisit.” As he spoke,
Away died the music in the firmament,
And unto silence left our parting hour.
No breeze will ever steal from nature's heart
So sweet again to me.

Isabel. Can'st thou not think
Of e'er again returning to the vale
Where we were born ? Should Frankfort come from
sea

Thou art his own betrothed : two such souls
Are not by God destin'd to live apart
Even on this earth, and ere you go to heaven

To join the blessed dead whom we deplore,
They would regard your life of sanctity
From their bright courts with joy, and your still walks
Through vale and forest by those holy watchers
Be kept from earthly ill.

Magd. Whate'er my doom,
It cannot be unhappy. God hath given me
The boon of resignation : I could die,
Though doubtless human fears would cross my soul,
Calmly even now ;—yet if it be ordain'd
That I return unto my native valley
And live with Frankfort there, why should I fear
To say I might be happy—happier far
Than I deserve to be?—Sweet Rydal lake !
Am I again to visit thee ? to hear
Thy glad waves murmuring all around my soul ?

Isabel. Methinks I see us in a cheerful group
Walking along the margin of the bay
Where our lone summer-house.....

Magd. Sweet mossy cell !
So cool—so shady—silent and compos'd !
A constant evening full of gentle dreams !
Where joy was felt like sadness, and our grief
A melancholy pleasant to be borne.
Hath the green linnet built her nest this spring
In her own rose-bush near the quiet door ?

Bright solitary bird ! she oft will miss
Her human friends : Our orchard now must be
A wilderness of sweets, by none beloved.

Isabel. One blessed week would soon restore its
beauty,

Were we at home. Nature can work no wrong.
The very weeds how lovely ! the confusion
Doth speak of breezes, sunshine, and the dew.

Magd. I hear the murmuring of a thousand bees
In that bright odorous honeysuckle wall
That once enclosed the happiest family
That ever lived beneath the blessed skies.
Where is that family now ? O Isabel,
I feel my soul descending to the grave,
And all these loveliest rural images
Fade, like waves breaking on a dreary shore.

Isabel. Even now I see a stream of sunshine bathing
The bright moss-roses round our parlour window !
Oh ! were we sitting in that room once more !

Magd. 'Twould seem inhuman to be happy there,
And both my parents dead. How could I walk
On what I used to call my father's walk,
He in his grave ! or look upon that tree
Each year so full of blossoms or of fruit .
Planted by my mother, and her holy name
Graven on its stem by mine own infant hands !

Isabel. It would be haunted, but most holy ground.

Magd. How tenderly did Frankfort love my parents !
From the first hour we met, his image seem'd
In the still bosom of our family
The silent picture of an absent friend !
—Methinks I hear his voice while he recites
Some fragment of a poem, or wild song
About the troubles of the pitiless sea.
Most other sailors have loud jocund voices ;
But his was always low and somewhat sad,
As if he bore within his soul the sound
Of that wild-raging world, the memory
Of battle and of shipwreck, and of friends
By death ta'en from him or captivity.

Isabel. Much hath that brave man suffer'd, yet he
pities
All them who mourn—nor on himself bestows
So much as one sad dream.

Magd. Dost thou remember
That melancholy but delightful strain
He framed one summer evening in our cell,
When that fair orphan came with streaming eyes,
To tell us that the lady of the castle,
Marie Le Fleming, on her death-bed lay ?

Isabel. I recollect it well.

Magd. The sorrowful

Still love to muse on all distressing things,
And sure her death was so. Repeat the dirge
Composed while she was parting from the earth.
Ere yet thy voice bēgin, I see the land,
The beautiful land of mountains, lakes, and woods,
All glimmering with a melancholy light
Which must unto mine eyes endure for ever.
O Isabel ! when o'er this doleful city
Rises the snow-white tower of Grassmere church—
—Go on,—go on, for I begin to rave.

DIRGE.

THE fairy on Helvellyn breathes
Into the diamond's lustre fair,
And in that magic gleam she wreathes
The dew-drops round her glittering hair.

The driving blast—the dimming rains
May there disturb its secret place,
But evermore the stone retains
The image of that loveliest face.

So in our lady's radiant eyes
Joy look'd when she was yet a child,
And there 'mid shades of sickness lies
Beauteous as when at first she smiled.

—'Tis said there is a wondrous bird
 That ne'er alights to fold her wings,
 But far up in the sky is heard
 The music which the creature sings.

On plumes unwearied, soft and bright
 She floateth still in hymning mirth,
 For ever in her native light !
 Unstain'd by any touch of earth !

Our lady's soft and gentle feet
 O'er earth in mortal motion swim,
 But angels come from heaven to meet
 The incense of her holy hymn.

—On yonder pool so black and deep,
 In her green cradle rock'd to rest,
 Behold the water-lily sleep !
 Serenely, with untroubled breast !

Alike unto that fearless flower
 The arrowy sleet—the dewy balm—
 The sunlight's smile—the tempest's lower—
 For hers is an eternal calm.

Across our gracious lady's bed
 A blast hath come as from the grave,
 But on her pillow rests her head
 'Calm as that lily on the wave.

—From heaven fair beings come at night
To watch o'er mortals while they sleep ;
Angels are they, whose sole delight
It is to comfort those who weep.

How softly on the dreamer's head
They lay their soft and snow-white hands !
One smile ! then in a moment fled,
They melt away to happier lands.

I wake ! and lo ! my lady fair
Is smiling near the orphan's bed,
With all the charms the living wear
Join'd to the beauty of the dead.

—O perfect is a plaintive tune
When slowly sung at fall of even,
In some wild glen beneath the moon,
When silence binds the earth and heaven !

Remembrance rises faint and dim
Of sorrows suffer'd long ago,
And joy delighteth in the hymn
Although it only breathe of woe.

Our lady's spirit it is pure
As music of departed years !
On earth too beauteous to endure,
So sad—so wild—so full of tears !

Magd. Methinks I see the splendid funeral
O'erspreading Grassmere churchyard. Vain parade !
Lost on the thousand weepers standing there,
With the image of that corpse so beautiful
Lying all dress'd with flowers before their souls.
The ancient castle from that dismal day
Seem'd going fast to ruin—the oak-wood
Is black and sullen 'mid sunshiny hours,
And oft upon the green and primrose bank
Of her own Rydal lake, the voice of grief
Comes with the little waves, a peaceful dirge
Of Nature o'er the lady whom she loved.

Isabel. Nature most gently led her unto rest.
And as her eyes grew dim, there swam before them
Sweet images of all that most she loved
Breathed from the heavens and earth. O different far
Must be our doom ! Hark ! hark the nightly shrieks !
At the same stated hour ! those thundering wheels !
Ah me ! I never hear that hideous noise,
But the deep hush of Grassmere vale—the tower
Chiming through morning-silence, and the lake
Reflecting all the heavens——

Magd. Of this no more,
My gentle Isabel ! Can we speak so long
About ourselves, and Frankfort's mother lying

A corpse ! It seems as if we had not loved her.
O we are selfish beings even when we think
That we have wean'd our souls from earthly joys.

Isabel. When is the funeral ?

Magd. At twelve o'clock

To-night will that delightful old man come,
To see them decently carried to the grave ;
And I will in that small procession walk
Close to her dear, dear head. She was beloved
By all who saw her once—so beautiful !
So meekly beautiful ! so sadly fair !
So happy in her solemn widowhood !

Isabel. You will return at midnight ?

Magd. Yes—kind heart !

And for one single day I must refrain
From visiting the sick. A trying day
Hath this been to me. O ye holy Ones,
With saints united in beatitude,
Look down upon us in this lonely room,
Sitting in the dimness of mortality,
With sorrow in our souls !—My Isabel,
I may not chant with thee our evening hymn,
For I am faint. Already have I pour'd
My heart in holy song unto the ear
Of pitying Jesus—sing it by thyself :
In silence will I join the sacred strain.

HYMN.

THE air of death breathes through our souls,
The dead all round us lie ;
By day and night the death-bell tolls
And says, " Prepare to die !"

The face that in the morning sun
We thought so wondrous fair,
Hath faded, ere his course was run,
Beneath its golden hair.

I see the old man in his grave
With thin locks silvery grey ;
I see the child's bright tresses wave
In the cold breath of the clay.

The loving ones we loved the best,
Like music all are gone !
And the wan moonlight bathes in rest
Their monumental stone.

But not when the death-prayer is said,
The life of life departs :
The body in the grave is laid,
Its beauty in our hearts.

At holy midnight voices sweet
Like fragrance fill the room,
And happy ghosts with noiseless feet
Come bright'ning from the tomb.

We know who sends the visions bright,
From whose dear side they came !
—We veil our eyes before thy light,
We bless our Saviour's name !

This frame of dust, this feeble breath,
The Plague may soon destroy ;
We think on Thee, and feel in death
A deep and awful joy.

Dim is the light of vanish'd years
In the glory yet to come ;
O idle grief ! O foolish tears !
When Jesus calls us home.

Like children for some bauble fair
That weep themselves to rest ;
We part with life—awake ! and there
The jewel in our breast !

SCENE III.

The open street.—A crowd of Men and Women gathered in a tumultuous manner.

1st *Man*. There goes a notable fool ! The moon is
yonder
Shining like the sun, but with a tamer light,
And yet with blazing oil-torch puffing forth
Its noisome vapours on each passenger,
This greasy varlet scours along the street,
Fixing his puny stars where'er he stops,
In many a long line twinkling sleepily.
What is the use of these same lamps ? The Plague
Is not afraid of light, and kills by day,
By moon-light, star-light, lamp-light, every light.
Is it that we may see each other's faces
More clearly as we pass ? Now, on my soul,
I have not seen one face for these three months
That spoke not of the grave. This very wretch,
With long lean shrivell'd shanks, look'd as he pass'd
Like some well-season'd dry anatomy
Escaped from Surgeons'-hall. The Plague, my girl,
Hath spoil'd the beauties of good London town,
And, (let me see thy face below this lamp,)

Good faith ! they're not so useless as I thought—
Had'st thou been Eve, Adam had ne'er been tempted.

2d Man. Ay ! folks may jest, and with right heavy
hearts.

For my own part, I don't expect this Plague
Will change its quarters, long as it has left
A single man alive. As for the moon
That shines so brightly, have you ever heard
What the Astrologers say of that moon ?

Woman. Tell, tell us what the Astrologers have said.

2d Man. They say it is the moon that sends the
Plague.

1st Man. The man in the moon ? then is he changed
indeed

Since days of yore. I have seen him when a boy
Crouching beneath his sticks most woefully,
Condemn'd to bear the load in punishment
Of Sabbath-breaking. Now he walks erect
With a huge sweeping scythe, and mows us down,
Us poor unhappy Londoners, like grass
By the acre.

3d Man. Yea ! before the Plague burst out,
All who had eye-sight witness'd in the city
Dread Apparitions, that sent through the soul
Forebodings of some wild calamity.
The very day-light seem'd not to be pour'd

Down from the sun—a ghastly glimmering haze
Sent upwards from the earth ; while every face
Look'd wan and sallow, gliding through the streets
That echoed in the darkness. When the veil
Of mist was drawn aside, there hung the sun
In the unrejoicing atmosphere, blood-red,
And beamless in his wrath. At morn and even,
And through the dismal day, that fierce aspect
Glared on the city, and many a wondering group
Gazed till they scarce believed it was the sun.
—Did any here behold, as I beheld,
That phantom who three several nights appear'd,
Sitting upon a cloud-built throne of state
Right o'er St Paul's Cathedral ? On that throne
At the dead hour of night he took his seat,
And monarch-like stretch'd out his mighty arm
That shone like lightning. In that kingly motion
There seem'd a steadfast threat'ning—and his features,
Gigantic 'neath their shadowy diadem,
Frown'd, as the phantom vow'd within his heart
Perdition to the city. Then he rose,
Majestic spectre ! keeping still his face
Towards the domes beneath, and disappear'd,
Still threatening with his outstretch'd arm of light,
Into a black abyss behind the clouds.

Voice from the crowd. I saw him—on the very night

I saw him,

When first the Plague broke out.

3d Man.

And saw ye not

The sheeted corpses stalking through the sky

In long, long troops together—yet all silent,

And, unobservant of each other, gliding

Down a dark flight of steps that seem'd to lead

Into the bosom of eternity?

Voice from the crowd. Go on, go on—tell us of what
thou sawest :

Thou art a scholar, and thy tongue can speak

Even like a written book. What sawest thou else?

3d Man. I have seen hearses moving through the
sky!

Not few and solitary, as on earth

They pass us by upon a lonesome road,

But thousands, tens of thousands moved along

In grim procession—a long league of plumes

Tossing in the storm that roar'd aloft in heaven,

Yet bearing onwards through the hurricane,

A black, a silent, a wild cavalcade

That nothing might restrain; till in a moment

The heavens were freed, and all the sparkling stars

Look'd through the blue and empty firmament!

Voice. They all foretold the Plague.

3d Man.

And I have seen

A mighty church-yard spread its dreary realms
O'er half the visible heavens—a church-yard blacken'd
With ceaseless funerals that besieged the gates
With lamentation and a wailing echo.
O'er that ærial cemet'ry hung a bell
Upon a black and thund'rous-looking cloud,
And there at intervals it swung and toll'd
Throughout the startled sky ! Not I alone,
But many thousands heard it—leaping up,
Not knowing whether it might be a dream,
As if an earthquake shook them from their beds,
Nor dared again to sleep.

1st Woman.

Cease, cease that jargon

About sights seen in the sky. The city shows
Phantoms, and hearses, and church-yards enow,
Without recourse to visions in the heaven.

Voice. Heed not that foolish wretch—go on, go on,
I love to feel my hair stand up on end,
And my heart beat till I can hear its sound.

3d Man. Dost not remember that black stormy night,
When all at once the hurricano ceased,
And silence came as suddenly as light
Bursting on darkness ? In that awful hush
The city like a panting monster lay,

Fearful of danger which it knew not of,
Yet felt that it was near. Then overhead,
As from a floating cloud, a mighty voice
Came like the roar of ocean, "Death! death! death!"
A thousand echoes wail'd the giant-cry
Faintlier and faintlier—till once more the storm
Rose on the night, and that portentous voice
Left the pale city quaking in its fear.

2d Woman. His words are like a dream—more terrible

These sights and sounds from the disastrous sky
Than all the real terrors of the Plague.

1st Man. Come, woman! with that wild and coal-black eye,

Let us hear thee speak! no idle dreamer thou!
I like that smile of scorn and bitterness.

1st Woman. I cannot say that I dislike the Plague.
Good faith! it yields rare harvest to the poor
Who are industrious, and will sit by night
Round beds where richer servants dare not come.
Yet after all 'tis not the Plague that kills,
But fear. A shake of the head—a sapient look—
Two or three ugly words mutter'd through the teeth—
Will go long way to send unto his grave
A soldier who has stood fire in his day.
And as for women, and the common run

Of men—for instance mercers, lawyers' clerks,
And others not worth mentioning, they die,
If a sick-nurse only look upon her watch
To know the hour of the night. What matters it ?
In a hundred years—all will be well again.

2d Woman. You must have seen rare sights in your
time, good woman !

1st Woman. I have seen for two months past some
score i' the day

Give up the ghost. No easy business
To lay so many out. When they paid well,
I did my office neatly—but the poor
Or niggardly, I put them overhand
In a somewhat careless way—gave them a stretch
Or two—down with their eye-lids—shut their mouths,
And so I left them. 'Twas but slovenly work.

2d Woman. Ha ! ha ! ha !—Why wert thou so kind,
brave wench !

Unto the lazy cruel-hearted rich ?
They owe at least one kindness to the poor.
Let them feel what still they preach of—gratitude.

1st Woman. I know not what the gentry and nobi-
lity

Think of this way of burial. In they go,
Beggar and banker, porter, gentleman,
The cinder-wench and my white-handed lady,

Into one pit. O rare ! rare bed-fellows !

There they all lie in uncomplaining sleep.

2d Woman. Can'st give some little history of the
dead ?

1st Woman. Yes—I could make your pale face paler
still,

Did I choose to be talkative—but one

Short history of a wretch who died to-day

I will give—and his name was Rivington.

Eternal curses blast that hateful name !—

Curst be he even within the crowded grave !

And may his lingering spirit feel the pressure

Of a hundred corpses weighing down its life,

In agony and torment, down to hell !

2d Woman. Come, for the story—you may spare your
curses.

God wot ! you waste your breath. The gentleman

Is dead—I'll warrant that his soul's ta'en care of.

1st Woman. I was sent for to a house that was
Plague-struck

To lay out two small children. Rivington !

Methought I knew that name. Could it be he

Whom twenty years before I knew too well

Among the towers of Oxford, where he studied,

As some said, for the church ; a worthy son

Of such a mother—no less worthy child

Of such a rare nurse—Oxford and the church !
At once I knew the caitiff, as he lay
Dying alone 'mid his dead family,
Whose blue-swollen faces had a look in them
Of their most wicked father. Had they lived,
They had been evil—no good could have come
From blood of his—it had a taint in it.
I had forgot to mention that his wife
Was likewise lying dead. Poor soul ! her face
Was beautiful, and seem'd the face of sorrow
Rather than of death. Much no doubt had she suffer'd,
Married for ten long years to such a husband !
When I had done my duty, “ Where's your gold ? ”
I ask'd this master of a family,
Who with a fix'd and stupid face was sitting
Idle in his chair. “ Where, ruffian ! is your gold ? ”
But, to make short a rather tedious story,
He knew me—knew that I was come to curse him,
To howl my dying curses in his ear,
Nor would I listen to his cowardly voice,
Imploring mercy and forgiveness. Curse him !

2d Woman. What was his crime ?

1st Woman. We were three sisters once,
Happy and young, and some thought beautiful,
And by our cheerful industry supported
Our palsied mother. But this demon came,

And by his wheedling arts and tempting gold,
Unknown to one another we all fell
Into sin, and shame, and sorrow. Our sick mother
Died of a broken heart—one sister died
In childbed—and consumption bred of grief
Soon took away another. I alone,
Reserved for farther woe and wickedness,
Lived on—but yet methinks this one small day,
Those two blest hours in which I saw him dying,
That minute when the rattle in his throat
Closed his vile tongue for ever, and the moment
When one convulsive gasp left him a corpse,
Gave me my share of earthly happiness,
And life feels life thus sweeten'd by revenge.

2d Woman. Felt you no little twinging of remorse,
Thinking on days when I suppose you loved him ?

1st Woman. I never loved him, and he knows what
love

He bore to me. Both had our punishment !
I for my folly, vanity and pride,
Base love of gold (for then that love was base
Which now is right, and just, and necessary,)
Have led a houseless life of infamy,
Despised, curst, fondled, starved. He for his lust,
Unnumber'd lies, and fearless cruelty,
Hath seen his children die before his face,

And his wife perish, stricken into death
'Mid the screaming of insanity. Remorse
Disturb'd his ruffled bed and dug his grave,
While she, within whose breast he often lay,
With the count'nance of a fury glared upon him,
And shook the dying caitiff in the pangs
Of pain and of despair. The hand of God
Was there in me its worthless instrument.

2d Woman. Let's go to merry-making—right good
friends

We two shall make. Left naked in the street
Was I, a little infant by its mother
Exposed to death. I in a poor-house pass'd
My hated, hateful youth; my womanhood
Like thine was chiefly pass'd where I began
My chance existence—in the street; and now
Without a friend, food, money, or a home,
What care I for the Plague? Let us go, my friend,
To merry-making.

1st Man. All this is mighty well,
But leads to nothing. Wilt thou rob a church,
Good master Pale-face? Wilt thou rob a church,
And share 'mid this our ragged company
The general spoil?

2d Man. Why, any place but a church!

1st Man. Ha ! thou'rt a scrupulous robber ! and the
sound

Of these psalm-singing, shrill-voiced choristers
Would frighten thee, gliding through the moonlight-aisle.
Troth, man ! 'tis well worth fighting with a ghost
For such a booty. Silver-candlesticks,
Gold-gilt, are standing idle on the altar,
Themselves a boy-load ! and they say a Crozier
Most richly ornamented may be found
In a lucky nook, no despicable bauble !
But ten times worth such trifles, think thou, Jesuit !
On the bright vessels for communion-service,
Of massy silver, which the surpliced priest
With both hands gives unto the trembling grasp
Of young communicants. When melted down
They will make us all as rich as Croesus. Come !
Let us off to the Cathedral.

2d Man. I for one
Stay where I am, or seek some other duty.
'Tis absolute sacrilege. I could not sleep
If I had lent a hand to rob a church.
I go not there to pray—neither will I go
To steal—'tis little short of sacrilege.
However, I am not obstinate, and 'tis pity
To part from pleasant company—suppose
We break into some house that is Plague-struck ?

Its tenants probably are dead—or dying,
And will make small resistance—to kill such
Cannot be well called murder.

Several voices. Agreed ! agreed !

[*A wild cry is heard, and a half-naked Man comes
raving furiously along.*]

2d Man. 'Tis the mad prophet ! for God's sake let
him pass.

Maniac. Woe ! woe ! unto the city ! woe ! woe ! woe !
The Prince of the air his palace fills to-day
With wicked spirits in their guilt destroy'd.
Repent ! repent ! before the red-eyed Wrath
Wither you to ghosts. His bloody scimitar
Is waving o'er the city. On your knees
Fall down, ye wild blasphemers !—'Tis too late,
Woe ! woe ! unto the city ! woe ! woe ! woe !

2d Man. We neither rob a church nor house this
night.

Maniac. Repent, ye miserable troop of ghosts.

2d Man. We cannot repent—fear binds us fast to
guilt.

Maniac. Another month, and I am left alone
In the vast city, shrieking like a demon !
Condemn'd to an eternal solitude
Peopled but by ghosts, that will not, will not speak !
All gliding past me, wan and silently,

With curses in their eyes, and death-like frost
Breathed from their bony hands, whose scornful fingers
Keep pointing at me rooted to the stones,
That yield no sound to comfort my stopp'd heart.

Crowd. O what a dreadful dream envelopes him !

Maniac. My sins have brought this judgment on
the city.

One sin there is that may not be forgiven,
And that was mine : so from the lurid sky
Down came the mighty and the fearful God,
And like a flash of lightning wither'd up
The hearts of his poor creatures. I alone
Am doom'd to live for ever in the depths
Of lifeless silence, which my madden'd shrieks
In vain will startle, like a lonely bird
Wailing unheeded in a vast sea-cave.

—O Jesus ! thou Destroyer ! once again
Thy voice of thunder stuns me. Woe ! woe ! woe !
—The streets do run with blood ! and groans of death
As with an earthquake shake the toppling walls.
Down falls yon spire—huzza ! down, down to hell.
Why stare ye so, ye dumb and pale-faced ghosts ?
O for a whirlwind's wing to sweep you away
Like broken clouds, or the autumnal leaves
Hissing through the cold heart of a dreary wood.

—I hear the voice!—Woe! woe! unto the city—
woe! woe! woe!

[*He rushes away shrieking.*

1st *Man.* O base and wretched cowards! by the
shrieks

Of a poor madman scared and terrified!
Thus they who take their conscience by the beard,
And laugh to scorn the voice that cannot lie,
At their own shadows start! now palsy-stricken
By the ravings of a drivelling idiot.

1st *Woman.* See where heaven dawns on hell!
Even in the path
Of that tormented demon, onward floats
An Angel! Mercy following Despair!

2d *Woman.* Let us fall down and worship her.
[*Enter MAGDALENE dressed in white, with a Bible in
her hand.*]

1st *Woman.* It is the lovely Lady no one knows,
Who walks through lonesome places day and night,
Giving to the poor who have no earthly friend;
To the dying comfort, to the dead a grave!
I am a harden'd sinner, yet my heart
Softens at that smile; and when I hear her voice,
I feel as in my days of innocence.

[*They kneel down before her.*

Magd. Rise up, my sisters and my brothers, rise!

Voice. How graciously she speaks unto the poor!

Angels have walk'd this earth. If thou art one,
And that voice tells thou art, whate'er its words,
Let us still kneel before thee ! sinful we !
And in our lives most desperately wicked ;
Yet, child of heaven ! believe us when we say
Religion hath not wholly left our hearts.

Magd. O piteous spectacle ! by my very birth
I am a creature sinful as yourselves !
And if my life have freer been from guilt,
I owe the blessing of my innocence
To Him whose blood can change the hue of sin
Into the whiteness of thrice-driven snow.

2d Woman. We are too wicked now to hope for
pardon.

Magd. Ye are not lost, but think that ye are so,
And therefore will not hope. Cheer up your souls !
Calmness will lead to hope, and hope to faith,
And faith unto that awful happiness
That walks unquaking through the shades of death,
Triumphant over nature's agony.

2d Woman. Walk not away ! speak to us yet a
while !

Magd. Return unto your homes, all ye that own
A home—a blessing even when desolate.
If young or old or sick, be pining there,
Think on the comfort of the Comforter.

If all have perish'd, turn your eyes to Him
Who dwells in Zion, and you need not fear
The dreadful stillness of unlook'd-for death.
I will pray with you ; ne'er forget your prayers !
Even now you felt how sweet it was to bless
Me, a poor sinful creature, since you think
That nature framed me kind and pitiful.
Pray unto Him who loved you on the cross !
Evening and morn and noon-day worship Him,
And what although your homes be desolate !
Your hearts will sing for joy—even as the lark
'Mid evening sunshine hymning up the sky,
Forgetful that since morn the spoiler's hand
Had torn her low-built nest.

2d Woman. O that the Plague
Would strike me dead before thou disappear—
For when thy heavenly face hath pass'd away,
What shall protect me from the ghastly looks,
The broken voice, of guilt and agony ?

Magd. Promise to pass this night in prayer.

Several voices. We promise.

1st Man. She is indeed most beautiful ! O misery,
To think that heaven is but a dream of fools !
Why gaze I on her thus, as if I felt her
To be immortal ! Something touch'd my soul
In that sad voice which earth can ne'er explain,

Priest. The comforter
Hath come to thee in solitude.

Frank. When left
With this still image, I confess my voice
Called upon her loud and frantically
To start up into life. Even then a smile
Came o'er her face, a sweet upbraiding smile
That silently reproved my senseless grief.
O look upon her face ! eternity
Is shadow'd there ! a pure immortal calm,
Whose presence makes the tumult of this world
Pass like a fleeting breeze, and through the soul
Breathes the still ether of a loftier climate !

Priest. Many sweet faces have I seen in death,
But never one like this. Death beautifies
Even the stern face of guilt, and I have seen
The troubled countenance of a sinful man
Breathed over, soon as life had pass'd away,
With a soft delicate shade,—as from the wing
Of Innocence returning to shed tears
Over the being she had loved in youth.
But here lies perfect beauty ! her meek face
Free as that child's from any touch of sin,
Yet shining with that loftier sanctity
That holds communion with the promised heavens.

Frank. (to *Wilmot*.) Kind friend! thou weep'st!

Such tears will not disturb *

Her sleep! see where they trickle silently

Down that unmoving cheek that feels them not,

As if they flow'd from eyes that may not weep.

Wil. My friend! may I kneel down and kiss her
cheek?

Frank. Start not at feeling that fair face so cold!
I often said that I would bring my friend
To see my mother. Lo! I have fulfill'd
My promise! There she lies!

Wil. As I touch'd her lips
Methought her dead face smiled a blessing on me!

Frank. Take thou this ringlet of her auburn hair:
'Tis a sweet auburn, mingled though it be
With the soft silvery grey! and be it blended
With these thick-clustering curls of undimm'd joy,
In beauty parted from the radiant head
Of this delightful child, and for my sake
Keep them for ever!

Priest. If deserved by love,
Part of these holy relics should be mine.

Frank. Ay! ay!—Now may I ask whose pious care
Hath placed these death-flowers here! Methinks I read
In the fair disposition of these flowers
The delicate language of a female hand,

Not unforgetful of the skill that cheer'd
Its hours of happier task, even in the sad
Graceful adornment of the dead ! One hand,
One hand alone on all the earth was worthy
To place these flowers—but it is far away !

Priest. What if that hand it were ?

Frank. Nay ! mock me not.

Haply thou heardest not my words aright.

Priest. One hand alone thou rightly said'st was
worthy

To fix that wreath. The fingers of that hand
Stirr'd not the braided hair that they did touch,
Nor moved one fold upon the funeral sheet,
So that the flowers they shed seem'd dropping there
In a dewy shower from heaven ! Thy Magdalene
It was indeed whose fingers dress'd the dead.

Frank. Magdalene ! and in the midst of this fell
Plague !

Mine is a most mysterious destiny.

—O spirit of my mother ! pardon me,
Though with thy dead body lying in my sight,
My soul with pangs returns unto the living,
If Magdalene indeed be with the living !—
That smile hath life in it. O blest old man,
Thou art indeed the servant of the Lord !

Priest. She lives ! and even now is on her way
To attend thy mother's funeral !

Frank. Speak—speak—

Priest. She is an orphan.

Frank. O my heart is dry !

Were Magdalene's self a corpse I could not weep.

Priest. I need not tell at length the mournful tale.

Three happy weeks with their delighted daughter

They walk'd the city—and the day was fix'd

For their return unto their native mountains.

But the Plague came

Frank. (*passionately.*) They surely were not thrown,

In the face of pity weeping all in vain,

Together thrown into that ghastly pit

Priest. 'Twas easy then to find a place of rest

In consecrated ground, and they were buried,

The very day they died, in a quiet spot

Even not without its beauty, at the foot

Of a small tree that Nature's self had planted,

In a city churchyard standing quite alone.

Frank. And where was Magdalene on the burial-day ?

Priest. I must not speak to thee of that one day !

But it is past and gone, and Magdalene

Is living. This is all I dare to utter.

There is an air that memory may not breathe,

And black oblivion hath ~~the~~ sacred ground

Guarded for aye by woe and misery.

Frank. Buried in a city 'mid a crowd of tombs !
Those floating locks blench'd by the ocean storms
Through many a perilous midnight—and that head,
On which the snows of age were gently falling
Through the hush'd air of peace—both in the earth !
—Spoke they not of a burial-place far off ?

Priest. They did—but with a smile.

Frank. It matters not.
—There is a little churchyard on the side
Of a low hill, that hangs o'er Rydal-lake,
Behind the house where Magdalene was born.
Most beautiful it is ; a vernal glade
Enclosed with wooded rocks ! where a few graves
Lie shelter'd, sleeping in eternal calm.
Go thither when you will, and that green spot
Is bright with sunshine. There they hoped to lie !
And there they often spoke to Magdalene
Of their own dying day. For death put on
The countenance of an angel in the place
Which he had sanctified. I see the spot
Which they had chosen for their sleep—but far,
O far away from that sweet sanctuary
They rest, and all its depth of sunny calm.
Methinks my Magdalene never dare return
To her native cottage.

Priest.

No ! she only smiled

When I implored her to forsake the city ;
Then said she would not leave her parents' bones.
Fain had she each day visited your mother,
But fear'd to bring infection——

Frank.

O my mother !

Forgive me, heaven ! I had not sure forgotten
That I am listening to thee by her coffin !
My Magdalene's care was vain—she came at last,
As these sad death-flowers tell.

Priest.

Not in some spot

Apart from death, in deathlike loneliness
Doth Magdalene dwell. Throughout the livelong day,
And many a livelong night, for these three months,
Hath she been ministering at the dying bed,
From which, with an unnatural cowardice,
Affection, ardent in the times of joy,
Had fled,—perhaps to stumble o'er the grave.
—What ! though thy Magdalene heretofore had known
Only the name of sorrow, living far
Within the heart of peace, with birds and flocks,
The flowers of the earth, and the high stars of heaven
Companions of her love and innocence ;
Yet she who, in that region of delight,
Slumber'd in the sunshine, or the shelter'd shade,
Rose with the rising storm, and like an angel,
With hair unruffled in its radiance, stood

Beside the couch of tossing agony ;
As undisturb'd as on some vernal day
Walking alone through mountain-solitude,
To bring home in her arms a new-yea'n'd lamb
Too feeble for the snow !

Frank. I wonder not !
Its beauty was most touching, and I loved
The bright and smiling surface of her soul :
But I have gazed with adoration
Upon its awful depths profoundly calm,
Seen far down shadowing the sweet face of heaven.

Priest. Many think she bears a charm against the
Plague ;
And they are not deceived. A charm she hath,
But hidden not in ring or amulet,
Sleeping in the quiet of her sinless soul.
Some think she is a spirit—many look
With tears of sorrow on a mortal creature
Whom death may steal away—but all agree
That a thing so piteous, kind, and beautiful,
Did never walk before upon this earth.

[*The door opens, and MAGDALENE enters.*]

Priest. Behold the blessed one of whom we speak !

Magd. (*seeing Frankfort and Wilnot kneeling with
their faces on the bed.*)

Haply some sorrowing friends unknown to me !

Frank. (rising.) Magdalene ! my holy Magdalene !

Magd. (throwing herself down beside him.)

Hush ! hush ! my Frankfort ! thus I fold one arm
Round thy blest neck, and with the other thus
I touch the silent dead !

Frank. O Magdalene !

'Tis a wild night of bliss and misery.

Magd. We both are orphans.

Frank. Hush ! I know it all.—

An angel's arms are round me—No ! a mortal's—

A mortal thing sublimed and beautified

By woes that would have broken many a heart.

In thy embrace what do I care for death !

In ev'ry breathing of thy holy bosom

I feel contentment, faith, and piety ;

Nor can the shadow of this passing world

Breathed o'er thy face of perishable beauty,

Bedim thy holy spirit—it is bright,

Nor seems to heed that gushing flood of tears.

Priest (to Wilmot.) Let us retire. The hour is draw-
ing near,

Fix'd for the funeral.

Wilmot. Heaven in mercy sent

That angel, with her dewy voice, and eyes

More dewy still, to stand beside the grave,

And show my friend how beautiful in heaven

His mother now must be ! That silent smile
To resignation might convert despair !

[*Priest and WILMOT retire.*]

SCENE V.

*A Churchyard—Midnight—a clear Moon and serene
Sky—a new-dug grave close to the church-wall, on
which are leaning the Sexton and his Assistant.*

Sexton. 'Tis a decent job enough ; for a beginner,
You handle your spade in no unpromising way,
And when our churchyard business revives,
(Confound that pit with its great ugly mouth—
'Tis the ruin of the trade)—you'll make, my boy,
A very pretty grave-digger. But hark-ye !
When standing good five feet below the sod,
Keep thine eyes open, and don't fling the gravel
Into my face, thou screech-owl. Stretch thyself
Up boldly like the son of a grave-digger,
And form the bank above thee neat and trim.
I wish to have some credit in my graves ;
And even although the kinsfolk be poor judges,
And mind these things but little, I have an eye,

A grave-digger's eye, that loves to a nicety
To see a trench drawn for its own dear sake.

—Why art thou shivering there, thou Aspen-leaf?

Boy. I never liked to walk through a churchyard.
And now, at the very dead hour o' the night,
This standing overhead within a grave
Hath made me colder than an icicle,—
Ay, numb as any grave-stone of them all.
I would not care to dig a grave in a field
Out in the country, and by good day-light;
But to keep poking in a deep black hole,
In the middle of a pavement of grave-stones,
With such a ghostlike moon above one's head,
And flinging out, instead of good plain pebbles,
Still yellow-grinning and worm-eaten skulls!—
—'Tis shocking work.

Sexton. Fie! you disgrace your trade,
You jackanapes! an ancient noble trade.
I'll get some bungler of a village-sexton,
Some bell-ringer well versed in psalmody
To bury thee like a dog, and lay thy coffin
With the wrong end to the headstone. Out on thee!

Boy. I think, old man! with both feet in the grave,
As one may say

Sexton. Ho! ho! advice, thou parrot!

With both feet in the grave ! I will be singing
Over my work for many a year to come,
When thou, and chicken-hearted birds like thee,
Will all be caged. Death loves a grave-digger,
And would not hurt a hair upon his head.
As for the Plague, he is afraid of us—
With a mattock and a shovel o'er my shoulder
He looks at me, and passes to such game
As thou, and smooth-faced maidens like to thee.

Boy. Didst ever see the lady and her child
Whose grave we have been digging—for if so,
And yet hast felt no pity at thy work,
Thou would'st not scruple for a yellow King Charles
To bury a Christian lying in a trance.

Sexton. Six years ago, I buried her good husband,
As proper brave a man as e'er was laid
Under the turf. I have known the family
Three generations, and I loved them all.
But where's the use of whimpering like a child
That never saw a grave ? Yet, by my spade,
I think if I had any tears to shed
I would waste them all upon this very mould !
For a sweeter lady never walk'd to church
Nor stepp'd across a grave-stone. She is in heaven !
And he who thinks so well may dig her grave
As merrily as a gard'ner in the spring.

Boy. See ! yonder two men standing with drawn
swords !

We shall be murder'd.

Sexton. Murder'd ! that's a trifle.

But robb'd of all our money. Hold it fast
If you know where to find it—grave-diggers
Still carry gold about them at their work.
They'll murder, rob, and bury us in a twinkling.

[*The Sexton and Boy stand silent within the
shadow of the Church-wall, and WALSING-
HAM and FITZGERALD approach.*

Fitz. This place is fitter for our present purpose
Than that we fix'd before. Here is a grave
Just ready for thy body, Walsingham !
Thou may'st have warmer lodgings for the night
At the price of one small word—"forgiveness."

Wal. Methinks such high-toned pride but ill be-
comes

A scene like this. What ! ask forgiveness
Of such a thing as thou—while the Great God
Beholds us standing here with murd'rous thoughts
Upon the dark brink of eternity !
Think what thou art, and what thou soon may'st be.

Fitz. Fool ! villain ! liar ! thus do I retort
Thy insupportable words. Thine is the pride—
The harden'd scorn is thine. But the hour is past

In which I might have pardon'd thee—and now
Look at this rapier, and prepare to die.

Wal. I am no coward. Yea ! I wish to die—
But in the shadow of the house of God,
I must not be a murderer.

Fitz. House of God !
Right pious words ! but they will not avail thee !
I think the Plague might well have scared such dreams,
Best cherish'd in the nursery, or by women
Whose faint hearts lean when sinking on religion.
God cares, forsooth, for us his worshippers !
Yet though we perish thousands in one night,
And like the brutes are buried, still we call him
Lord—Priest and Father, and still hope to rise
Even from the crowded pit where we lie smother'd
Like bees in brimstone,—to rise beautiful,
And soar to God's throne, spirits glorified !
O bitter mockery ! Look into that pit
With all its dread corruption steaming up
To heaven, like an unheeded sacrifice,
And then dare talk of immortality.

Sexton, (discovering himself.)
I crave your pardon—but I did not dig
That grave for you, much-honour'd gentlemen.
It is bespoken, and the worthy owner
In half an hour will come to take possession.

I have heard of people fighting for small cause,
Or none—but cutting throats in a churchyard
Is something new, and 'tis an ugly practice.

Fitz. (rushing on Walsingham.)

Here's at thy heart !

[*He receives Walsingham's sword in his heart,
and falls, exclaiming,*]

O Christ ! stone-dead ! stone-dead !

Sexton. Killing no murder—'twas in self-defence.
You've a quick eye, good sir ! or he had pink'd you.
These swords are ugly and unhandy things,
I never liked them.

Wal. Now I am a murderer !
That hideous name befits me ! I have sent him,
In all the blindness of his atheist heart,
To his dread audit ! Pho ! his blood will redden
Upon my hands for ever. Wretch that I am !

Sexton. I hear them coming.

Wal. Whom dost thou hear
coming ?

Sexton. Listen ! and hear the holy sound of psalms.

[*The funeral approaches the grave where WAL-
SINGHAM is sitting near the dead body,—MAG-
DALENE, ISABEL, PRIEST, FRANKFORT, and
WILMOT.*]

Priest. What shocking sight is this? O Walsingham,

My much-beloved and much-erring boy!
I fear that thou hast done a deed of sin,
For which remorse will haunt thee all thy days.

Wal. I hear thy voice, but dare not lift my eyes
Up to thy solemn countenance. I could bear
Thy anger, but the pity of the righteous
Speaks to the little virtue that is left
In my distracted soul, and when I hear it,
O that in dumb deaf darkness I could lie!

Frank. We two are brothers in calamity.

Wal. Frankfort? O now I know who fills that
coffin.

Behold how with these blood-bedabbled hands
I tremble in the presence of her corpse.
Look here—look here—upon this stiffening body!
Its face convuls'd, cries out “a murderer!”

[*He flings himself down.*]

Sexton. Manslaughter at the worst. There was no
murder.

Frank. He heeds us not—lost in the agony
Of his remorse. A more compassionate spirit—
One more averse to the shedding of man's blood,
Yet of his own more prodigal, never graced
The name of seaman.

Magd. No mortal ever led a happier life.
Her husband died and she was sorrowful,—
But misery ne'er disturb'd her soul serene,
That like a place of worship aye was husht
By day and night,—or with the voice of hymns
Singing most sweetly to the ear of heaven.

Frank. I wonder not so much that she hath died,
As that a soul so perfect should have liv'd
So long in this sad world.—My little William,
Buried in all thy beauty—fare thee well !
Thank God ! I never said an unkind word
To the sweet infant ! Tears were in his eyes,
When last I went to sea—and when I said,
That I would bring him home the loveliest shells,
He smiled and wept. His face is smiling now
Far, far down in the darkness of the grave.

[*They all kneel down around the grave.*]

END OF THE SECOND ACT.

ACT III.

SCENE I.

The PRIEST and WILMOT walking in a square of the City.—Evening after the funeral of FRANKFORT'S mother.

Wil. How sweetly have I felt the evening-calm
Come o'er the tumult of the busy day
In a great city ! when the silent stars
Stole out so gladsome through the dark-blue heavens,
All undisturb'd by any restless noise
Sent from the domes and spires that lay beneath,
Hush'd as the clouds of night.

Priest. Even now 'tis so.
Did'st thou e'er see a more resplendent moon ?
A sky more cloudless—thicker set with stars ?

Wil. The night is silent—silent was the day.
But now methinks that sky's magnificence
Darkeneth the desolation on the earth !
Even such the silence of a beautiful sea,
Rolling o'er a thousand wrecks.

Priest. Let us sit down
Upon this seat, beneath its sheltering trees ;
And if my soul can face the fearful things
Which it has seen and suffer'd, thou shalt hear
How a whole city perish'd—a whole city !
For, walking on the shore we rightly call
The ocean calm, though distant waves be breaking
With melancholy dash against the rocks.

Wil. Fit place it is for such wild colloquy !
These empty houses, and that half-built spire,
Standing with all its idle scaffolding.....

Priest. I see a thousand sights thou can'st not see,
Glimmering around me—confused sights of woe
Mingling in the train of joy and happiness.
Sweet lovely children all around my feet
Are sporting—for this wide square was the playground
Where the bright families of prosperous men
Walk'd in the sunshine with their fairy dresses,
Laughing 'mid the flowers!—O many a slow-paced
hearse

I see—and little coffins borne along
Beneath some solitary mourner's arm.
Mix'd are these images of life and death !
For while I muse upon the silent face
Of one dead infant, crowds of living spirits
Come singing by—and though I see a coffin,

They see it not, but glide with sunny feet
O'er the black pall, then disappear for ever.

Wil. Came it on a sudden ?

Priest. Like a thunder-peal

One morn a rumour turn'd the city pale ;
And the tongues of men, wild-staring on each other,
Utter'd with faltering voice one little word,
" The Plague !" Then many heard within their dreams
At dead of night a voice foreboding woe,
And rose up in their terror, and forsook
Homes, in the haunted darkness of despair
No more endurable. As thunder quails
Th' inferior creatures of the air and earth,
So bow'd the Plague at once all human souls,
And the brave man beside the natural coward
Walk'd trembling. On the restless multitude,
Thoughtlessly toiling through a busy life,
Nor hearing in the tumult of their souls
The ordinary language of decay,
A voice came down that made itself be heard,
And they started from delusion when the touch
Of Death's benumbing fingers suddenly
Swept off whole crowded streets into the grave.
Then rose a direful struggle with the Pest !
And all the ordinary forms of life
Moved onwards with the violence of despair.

Wide flew the crowded gates of theatres,
And a pale frightful audience, with their souls
Looking in perturbation through the glare
Of a convulsive laughter, sat and shouted
At obscene ribaldry and mirth profane.
There yet was heard parading through the streets
War-music, and the soldier's tossing plumes
Moved with their wonted pride. O idle show
Of these poor worthless instruments of death,
Themselves devoted ! Childish mockery !
At which the Plague did scoff, who in one night
The trumpet silenced and the plumes laid low.
As yet the Sabbath-day—though truly fear
Rather than piety fill'd the house of God—
Received an outward homage. On the street
Friends yet met friends, and dared to interchange
A cautious greeting—and firesides there were
Where still domestic happiness survived
'Mid an unbroken family ; while the soul,
In endless schemes to overcome the Plague,
In art, skill, zeal, in ruth and charity
Forgot its horrors, and oft seem'd to rise
More life-like 'mid the ravages of death.
But soon the noblest spirits disappear'd,
None could tell whither—and the city stood
Like a beleaguer'd fortress, that hath lost,

The flower of its defenders. Then the Plague
Storm'd, raging like a barbarous conqueror,
And hopeless to find mercy, every one
Fell on his face, and all who rose again
Crouch'd to the earth in suppliant agony.

Wil. Father ! how mournful every Sabbath-day
To miss some well-known faces ! to behold
The congregation weekly thin'd by death,
And empty seats with all their Bibles lying
Cover'd with dust.

Priest. Ay—even the house of God
Was open to the Plague. Amid their prayers
The kneelers sicken'd, and most deadly-pale
Rose up with sobs,—and beatings of the heart
That far off might be heard, a hideous knell
That ne'er ceased sounding till the wretches died.
Sometimes the silent congregation sat
Waiting for the priest, then stretch'd within his shroud.
Or when he came, he bore within his eyes
A trouble that disturb'd, and read the service
With the hollow voice of death.

Wil. Where was the king ?
The nobles, and the judges of the land ?

Priest. They left the city. Whither—none inquired.
Who cares now for the empires of the earth,
Their peerage or their monarchs ? Kingly ones

Sit unobserved upon their regal seats,
And the soul looks o'er ocean, earth, and air,
Heedless to whom its fields or waves belong,
So that there were some overshadowing grove
Central amid a mighty continent,
Or sacred island in the healthful main,
Where men might be transported in a thought
Far from the wild dominion of the Plague.
Now He is monarch here—nor mortal brow
Durst wear a crown within the fatal sweep
Of his long bony arm.

Wil. He loves the silence
Of an unpeopled reign.

Priest. Once at noon-day
Alone I stood upon a tower that rises
From the centre of the city. I look'd down
With awe upon that world of misery ;
Nor for a while could say that I beheld
Aught save one wide gleam indistinctly flung
From that bewildering grandeur : Till at once
The objects all assumed their natural form,
And grew into a City stretching round
On every side, far as the bounding sky.
Mine eyes first rested on the squares that lay
Without one moving figure, with fair trees
Lifting their tufted heads unto the light,

Sweet, sunny spots of rural imagery
That gave a beauty to magnificence,
Silent as nature's solitary glens
Slept the long streets—and mighty London seem'd,
With all its temples, domes, and palaces,
Like some sublime assemblage of tall cliffs
That bring down the deep stillness of the heavens
To shroud them in the desert. Groves of masts
Rose through the brightness of the sun-smote river,
But all their flags were struck, and every sail
Was lower'd. Many a distant land had felt
The sudden stoppage of that mighty heart.
Then thought I that the vain pursuits of man
Possess'd a semblance of sublimity,
Thus suddenly o'erthrown ; and as I look'd
Down on the courts and markets, where the soul
Of this world's business once roar'd like the sea,
That sound within my memory strove in vain,
Yet with a mighty power, to break the silence
That like the shadow of a troubled sky
Or moveless cloud of thunder, lay beneath me,
The breathless calm of universal death.

Wil. I feel all fears for my own worthless self
Vanish at thy voice—but it grows tremulous—
I now will hear no more. I know not why
My soul thus longs to feast itself on terror—

Last night I saw enough. O that churchyard !
That madman's dance !

Priest. My voice is tremulous,
For I shall never see fourscore again.
But I can speak to thee about the Plague
That rages round us, with as calm a soul
As if a hundred years had pass'd away
Since yonder Pest-house heard the groans and shrieks
Of more than mortal agony.

Wil. A Pest-house !
O dreadful habitation ! I beheld it,
As if in silence standing tenantless.
List ! list ! what fearful cries ! They will burst the walls,
And issue forth a ghost-like company
Into the frighten'd air. Now—now—'tis silent !
As if in that one shriek they all had perish'd.

Priest. Let not thy spirit penetrate its walls.
Our Saviour pities it.

Wil. And who will go
Into such tomb-like building fill'd with horror ?

Priest. Ay ! 'tis a dreadful mansion, standing there
So black ! as if the very walls did know
The agony within. Yet hither come
The children of despair and poverty,
Who baring bosoms yellow with Plague-spots
Implore admittance, and with hollow voice

Do passionately vow their gratitude,
If suffer'd to lay down their rending heads
On the straw pallets—so that skilful men
May visit them, even when the wretches say
They have no hope. Poor souls ! perhaps they die
In mitigated agony at last ;
But when a ghost-like shadow enters there
It sees the sun no more.

Wil. Didst thou ever pray
Within that fearful tabernacle ?

Priest. Yes !
'Tis but two nights ago I thither went
To minister the sacrament. I heard
A hideous din before I reach'd the door—
And entering I beheld the ghastly patients
Walking tumultuously throughout the room,
Some seemingly in anger—all the rest
In mute despair. There lay th' attendants dead,
And thirst had come upon that pale-faced crew,
Who gasp'd, and made wild motions with their hands,
When in their parch'd mouths prayers or curses died.

Wil. It was most horrible.

Priest. But I have witness'd
A sight more hideous still. The Plague broke out
Like a raging fire within the darksome heart
Of a huge mad-house ; and one stormy night

As I was passing by its iron gates,
 With loud crash they burst open, and a troop
 Of beings all unconscious of this world,
 Possess'd by their own fearful phantasies,
 Did clank their chains unto the troubled moon
 Fast rolling through the clouds. Away they went
 Across the glimmering square ! some hurriedly
 As by a whirlwind driven, and others moving
 Slow—step by step—with melancholy mien,
 And faces pale in idiot-vacancy.
 For days those wild-eyed visitors were seen
 Shrieking—or sitting in a woeful silence,
 With wither'd hands, and heaps of matted hair !
 And they all died in ignorance of the Plague
 That freed them from their cells.—

Will.

Do none recover

Whom the Plague strikes ?

Peter.

Not one in many thousands.

Yet two such wretches have I chanced to see,
 And they are living still—far better dead !
 For they have lost all memory of the past,
 All feeling of the future. Their own names
 They know not—nor that they are human beings.
 Like images of stone there do they sit,
 When all around is agony ; or laugh,
 As if their features only were convulsed,

In the absence of all soul ! Ay, long and loud
The laughter is of those stone-images,
Sitting unmoved with their glazed steadfast eyes !
And none can tell why the poor wretches laugh
Who know not how to weep.

Wil. How many children
Must have died in beauty and in innocence
This fatal summer !

Priest. Many sweet flowers died !
Pure innocents ! they mostly sank in peace.
Yet sometimes it was misery to hear them
Praying their parents to shut out the Plague ;
Nor could they sleep alone within their beds,
In fear of that dread monster. Childhood lost
Its bounding gladsomeness—its fearless glee—
And infants of five summers walk'd about
With restless eyes, or by their parents' sides
Crouch'd shuddering, for they ever heard them speaking
Of death, or saw them weeping—no one smiled.

Wil. Hath not the summer been most beautiful,
'Mid all this misery?

Priest. A sunny season !
What splendid days, what nights magnificent
Pass'd in majestic march above the City,
When all below was agony and death !
“ O peaceful dwellers ! in yon silent stars,

Burning so softly in their happiness !”
Our souls exclaim’d,—“ unknown inhabitants
Of unknown worlds ! no misery reaches you,
For bliss is one with immortality !”
The very river as it flow’d along
Appear’d to come from some delightful land
Unknown unto the Plague, and hastening on
To join the healthful ocean, calmly smiled,
A privileged pilgrim through the realms of death.
Yea ! in the sore disturbance of men’s souls
They envied the repose of lifeless things !
And the leafy trees that graced the city-squares,
Bright with the dews of morning, they seem’d blest !
On them alone th’ untainted air of heaven
Shed beauty and delight—all round them died.
London alone, of all the world seem’d curst.
O happy spots in country—or in town !
’Mid savage wilds—or dark and noisome streets—
Cut off from human intercourse—or haunted
By vice and sorrow, penury and guilt,
Ye seem’d to all a blessed Paradise,
Whither on wings of rapture they would fly,
Nor ever leave you more—for nature groans
“ Where the Plague is not, there dwells happiness.”

Wil. Dreadful indeed, to think how months and
months

Have pass’d, and still are passing, without hope.

Priest. In churchyards, not in houses, it did seem
As if the people lived. They haunted there.
It was, you well may think, a woeful sight
In every burial-ground to see the grave-stones
Blacken'd o'er with persons, sitting night and day,
Bewailing their lost friends. But sadder still,
Ere long to see the self-same tombstones bare,
Telling how few at last were left to weep.
Sometimes I take my solitary stand
In one of those wide churchyards. Onwards pass
A multitude of faces recognised
Dimly, as beings vanish'd from this world :
Till, as I gaze upon them, memory
Disowns the wild creation of my brain,
And the image of those countless myriads,
Some strange procession seems of unknown creatures
On some unknown occasion moving by,
And cloud-like disappearing from my soul,
A shifting pageant journeying endless on !

Wil. And all immortal souls ! sent from this world
As by a breath ! like insects vanishing
On a sudden, when a breeze comes o'er the silence
Of a sultry summer-noon !—

Priest. What meets thine eyes ?

Wil. Lo ! yonder Frankfort walking toward us.
Is there not something wild in his appearance ?

I trust that all is well with Magdalene.

Alas ! should she be dead !

Priest. 'Tis for himself

I fear that we must weep. That devious pace,

Now stopping on a sudden—and now hurried,

As by a raging wind against the will

I tremble to behold it—for the Pest

Oft dallies thus with its delirious victims.

And yet some agitation of the mind

[*Wilmot goes up to Frankfort as he is passing
by distractedly without noticing them.*

Wil. Companion—messmate—friend—best, dearest
friend,

Wilt thou not speak to us ?

Frank. Hoist out the barge—

My crew will pull her through the roaring surf.

I have a mother dying of the Plague

Wil. Sweet friend ! look, look around ! O misery !
His mind is overthrown.

Frank. Say who art thou

That glarest so upon me with thine eyes ?

Hadst thou a brother once ?

Wil. My name is Wilmot.

Frank. Wilmot ? Methinks I know thee ! Wilmot !

Wilmot !

Wil. I owe my life to thee.

Frank.

O merciful God !

A roaring whirlwind hurries off my soul—
I surely feel these stones beneath my feet ;
Houses are standing round me—yet even now,
If ever sailor trod upon a deck,
I was on board the Thunderer. What dark building
Towers yonder like a cloud ? Is it a mad-house ?
No irons on my hands O chain me—chain me—
In mercy to one steadfast place of earth,
Nor drive me onwards like a heaving wave
Over the midnight sea.

Priest.

Touch this grey head !

Frank. Old man ! thou hast a kind and gentle look—
—Then tell me this, and I will bless thee for it.
Did a fair maiden come on board to-day,
Calling herself, with a low mournful voice,
Magdalene Lambert ? Did she ask for me
With that low mournful voice, and hath she gone
Weeping away because she found me not ?
Drest is she all in white, as Poets feign
The angel Innocence—and when she speaks
Wilmot, I know thee now—hath something dreadful
Fallen on my head—or am I in a fever,
And raving here with a distemper'd brain ?

Priest. We are indeed thy friends ! Look at this hair
Which I am wearing close unto my heart

For thy dear mother's sake. Behold how softly
The silver-lined auburn doth repose,
Amid the sunshine of sweet William's ringlets.

[*Frankfort falls on his neck and weeps.*]

Frank. Conduct me home—home—home—whate'er
I say.

But look not so O, ye dim ghastly faces,
I know ye not I am your prisoner
Lead, lead me hence, and chain me in my cell.

Priest (to Wilmot.) Let us conduct him home !
prepare thy soul
For what this night may happen to thy friend.
For death is in his face.

SCENE II.

MAGDALENE *seen lying asleep on a couch*—ISABEL
and a Young Girl sitting beside her.

Isabel. Didst thou e'er see so beautiful a face ?
Lo ! how it smiles through sleep ! Even in her dreams
Her soul is at some work of charity.

Child. May I go softly up, and kiss her cheek ?
O why is it so pale ?

Isabel. 'Twas always so.

I must be happy in spite of all the tears
That gush into mine eyes. My mother stood
Close to my pillow last night in a dream,
And bade me weep no more, for that an angel
Had folded over me her heavenly wings.
I woke—and there wert thou ! at my bedside,
With these delightful smiles.

Magd.

O Isabel !

Of all the mournful—sad—affecting things
That sorrow meets with in a world of sorrow,
The saddest sure those smiles of happiness,
Those sudden starts of uncontrollable glee,
That, like the promptings of a different nature,
Assail the heart of childhood 'mid its grief,
And turn its tears to rapture. Beauteous beings !
Hanging in the air 'twixt joy and misery !
Now like the troubled sea-birds wildly-wailing
Through the black squall ;—and now upon the billows
Alighting softly with the gleams of light,
They float in beauty of a fearless calm.

Isabel. Why so profound a sigh ?

Magd.

A deadly pain

Even at that moment struck into my heart.
A sudden fear disturbs me—look on my face—
Seest thou aught wild and strange within my eyes ?
Fear not to speak the truth.

Isabel.

O nought I see

Within these eyes but a meek tender light
Softer than swimming tears—and on thy face
The same pale beauty lies by all beloved
Even when thou wert a child—a breathing paleness
More touching than the cheeks so rosy-red
Of other children—nothing else see I.

Magd. O shame ! I feel the tears upon my cheek,
I weep that I must die. O days and nights
Past on my knees beside the bed of death,
Have ye been all in vain ! I shudder at death
Even as this child would do—Most mournful weakness !

Child. I would not fear to die within your arms.

Magd. Bring me yon little mirror here—sweet child !
And as you come with it, look in and see
As fair a face as ever Innocence
Put on to gladden her own gazing soul !

[*The Child gives the looking-glass to Magdalene,
who after a single glance continues.*]

One look into that glass, reveal'd my fate.
I wish not to deceive my Isabel.
I feel that I am dying.

Isabel, (falling on her knees.) Merciful God !
Let the cup of death pass from her holy lips.

Magd. One momentary pang when torn from earth !
I am resign'd.

Isabel. O last night's awful scene
Hath overcome thy body and thy soul.
Both are disquieted—but both ere long
Will wake to peace.—Assist me, Margaret,
And we two, soft and silent as a dream,
Will lay her on that bed. How feels my mistress ?
[*They support her to bed.*

Magd. Too well am I acquainted with the Plague,
And all its fatal symptoms. I beheld
The slumb'rous weight upon my eyes, the dim
Blue shade that never more must leave my cheeks—
My lips are touch'd by death—before the hour
Of earliest morning—the small midnight hour—
—O Heaven protect my faithful Isabel,
And waft her safe, as on an angel's wing,
To that sweet Lake which I must see no more !

Isabel. This world at once is darken'd.

Magd. Frankfort ! come,
O thy sweet voice will all be lost on me !—
—Last night I dreamt of death and burial :
The Plague had stricken me in my troubled sleep !
Look here—death-tokens on my breast !

[*Isabel rushes into her arms and kisses her bosom.*]

Isabel. These kisses
Will cure my agony ! O savage death !
May not the touch of that angelic bosom

Win o'er to pity thy relentless soul !

Alas ! that mortal blueness hath been spread

By the chill air of the grave !

Magd.

Kiss—kiss me not.

Isabel. Till death come from thy bosom—I will kiss
thee.

Child. Lady ! I hear a soft tap at the door.

Magd. Then open it, my little fearful maid,
For none but friends come here.

Enters the Old Priest.

Priest.

What ! all in tears !

Isabel. O sir ! look here !—look here !

Priest.

My holy child !

O ghost-like now thy more than mortal beauty !

Canst thou not raise thy head ?

Magd.

O pray for me.

Priest. Daughter ! thy name is well-beloved in heaven.
There hath been something in thy destiny
Above our human nature, and thy soul
Conspicuous, like a never-setting star,
Hath shone o'er all the city—shedding joy
And consolation. There is need of thee
In this most wicked and afflicted world,
And therefore do I trust with holy awe
That death's dark shadow will pass over thee,

And thou in undimm'd beauty reappear !

—If so the will of God !

Magd. Thou must pray for me,
While yet I hear and understand thy prayers.
Too well thou thinkest of me—I am weak
In all my being—weaker far than many
Who have died unpraised—unhallow'd and unwept.
O sinful pride ! and base hypocrisy !
If in the deep prostration of my soul
I did not so confess. My earthly nature,
With eager visitings to all unknown,
Oft haunted me, when I was kneeling down
In prayer with others—holding up the head
From which all sense was parting. Oh ! my pity
Was oft imperfect—almost insincere !
Yet God may in his boundless love accept
My feeble efforts. Faith at least is mine.
Oh ! were that gone I should be poor indeed.

Priest. Daughter ! in happier mood thou could'st
not die.

Magd. O father! when I lived in happiness,
I drank the cup of joy, and often fail'd
To thank the hand that gave it. Years pass'd by,
And still I grew and flourish'd like a flower,
Unconscious of the sun that blesseth it.

But now the sadness of ingratitude
Disturbeth me, when I have need of comfort.

Priest. God is well satisfied with innocence.
The pure soul best doth prove its gratitude
By acquiescence to his will supreme,—
Calm thoughts and meek desires,—unsought-for bliss
Coming to youth from all the points of heaven,—
And above all, by natural piety,
That sees love, beauty, and delight on earth,
And on their wings mounts every happy man
Up to the gates of heaven. Thy joyful years
Are not forgotten by the Power that gave them,
And not one virtuous momentary thought
E'er stirr'd thy heart that is not register'd
In the book of mercy—therefore calm thy soul.

Magd. I cannot doubt the language of these eyes,
So solemn—saint-like !—O were Frankfort happy !
I now could follow death into the grave
As joyfully as in the month of May
A lamb glides after its soft-bleating mother
Into a sunny field of untrod dew.
Heaven will protect my Isabel ! Thou too,
My well-beloved friend of yesterday,
Wilt have a gentle father. Dry thy tears—
Yet youth will dry them for thee. If my Frankfort—

[*She starts suddenly up in bed.*]

Take—take away these hands before thy face
And tell me in one word—“is he alive?”

Priest. He is alive—but his perturbed soul
Is tost and driven throughout a ghastly dream.

Magd. Is he alone—in his insanity?
O that the Plague would prey upon our bodies,
But leave the spirit free!

Priest. Wilmot is with him.

Magd. Eternal bliss be with that fearless friend!

Priest. It may not be the Plague.

Magd. It is the Plague.

I know it is the Plague—and he will die.

Isabel. O lady! rise not up.

[*MAGDALENE rises from bed and stands in the
midst of them.*]

Magd. What! remain here?

In what I say I must not be oppos'd.
You love me—therefore in your love be silent.
I go to Frankfort—I shall not fall down
In the street before I reach him. I feel strong,
And could walk many miles. Come, Isabel.
Let me kiss the book of God before I go.—
Farewell, my little room! Thou art indeed
A calm and peaceful cell—and I have pass'd
Many still hours of awful happiness

Within thy lonely twilight. Now, farewell !
I leave thee for a lodging calmer yet.

SCENE III.

FRANKFORT *lying on a bed in the house of his deceased Mother.*—WILMOT *watching beside him.*

Frank. Go upon deck, and tell me if thou seest
The signal flying for close line of battle.
Does our good vessel lead the van to-day ?
Or will these tame and cautious Hollanders
Still keep a lee-shore on their skulking bows ?

Wil. Look on me, Frankfort—this is all a dream.

Frank. No time for jesting. Tell the old lieutenant,
That a braver seaman never trod the deck,
But that I fight my ship myself to-day,
She is his when I am killed.

Wil. Look at this bed—
These curtains pictured o'er with little birds
Sporting in a grove of spring. Thy cabin, Frankfort,
Hath no such peaceful garniture. Look here,
We have no windows like to these at sea.
Frankfort, thou art a right good seaman still,
And in thy raving fits must needs be fighting

With these poor Dutchmen.—Prithee let them rest
In their flat-bottom'd vessels for one day.

—Ha ! thou art smiling !

Frank. Yes ! I well may smile
At my poor wandering soul. Wilmot ! a ship
Doth on the ocean hold the raging winds
At her command—queen-like as doth become her.
But I am driven along a glimmering sea,
And know not how to bear up 'gainst the storm.

Wil. Thank God, you recognise your friend at last.

Frank. I know thee now—but whether the next
moment

Thy face may seem to me what now I think it,
God only knows. It is a dreadful state,
When, like a horse, by lightning scared to madness,
One's soul flies with him wheresoe'er it will,
And still one feels that he is hurried on,
But cannot stop—in terror hurried on—
Away—away—away—a frightful race !

Wil. Thou may'st remember what vagaries I
Once fell into, when that fierce tropic sun
Did smite my brain with fever. Then, heaven bless me !
I was far more pacific in my dreams,
And fancied all the world in love with me.

Frank. What fool hath brought our vessel to an an-
chor ?

Order the master down—by heaven the Fleet
Will laugh us all to scorn. Hark, a broadside !
We are a long league in the admiral's wake
While he is closing with the enemy.
Hoist every inch of canvass—I will soon
Recover my lee-way.

[*He leaps out of bed with great violence, and falls senseless on the floor. After a long fainting-fit, he exclaims,*]

Where am I, Wilmot ?—

Where art thou, my pure spirit—where is Magdalene ?

Wil. She and the old Priest will be here anon.

Frank. Is this a stormy night ?

Wil.

A perfect calm.

Frank. The noise of thunder and tempestuous
waves

Is raging in my soul.

Wil.

'Tis all a dream.

Frank. O hold me—hold me fast—keep, keep me
here.

I am on board a ship, and she is sinking

Down to the very bottom of the sea.

She bounds up from the abyss—and o'er the billows

Rolls manageless—and now—now water-logg'd

Is settling—settling—till she sink like lead,

Never to rise again ! Hush—hush, my crew !

In shipwreck fearless as in battle—hush !

Let us sink in silence to eternity.

Wil. On good dry land are we, my boy ! at last,
Though yet the rolling of our gallant ship
Is loath to leave our brains. Smile to me, messmate.

Frank. Have we been travelling o'er foreign lands,
And met adventures perilous and wild ?
Thou seem'st to look on me with asking eyes !
Listen, and I will tell a fearful story :
But interrupt me not—for like a flood
That hath been all night raging 'mid the mountains,
My soul descends from its wild solitude,
And must sweep on till all its troubled thoughts
Have from their headlong fury found repose.
Thou wilt not interrupt me ?

Wil.

No ! my friend !

Frank. It seemeth many many years ago
Since I remember aught about myself ;
Nor can I tell why I am lying here.
Before I fell into this dream, I saw
A most magnificent and princely square
Of some great city. Sure it was not London ?
No—no—the form and colour of those clouds
So grim and dismal never horrified
The beautiful skies of England, nor such thunder
Ever so growl'd throughout my native clime.

It was the capital city of a kingdom
Lying unknown amid unvoyaged seas,
Where towers and temples of an eastern structure
With airy pomp bewilder'd all my soul.
When gazing on them, I was struck at once
With blindness and decay of memory,
And a heart-sickness almost like to death.
A deep remorse for some unacted crime
Fell on me. There, in dizziness I stood,
Contrite in conscious innocence—repentant
Of some impossible nameless wickedness
That bore a dread relation unto me.
A ghastly old man—and a noble youth,
Yet with fierce eyes that smiled with cruelty,
Came up to me all lost in wonderment
What spots of blood might mean beneath my feet
All over a bed of flowers. The old man cried,
“Where is thy mother, impious parricide !
Ha ! thou hast buried her beneath these flowers.”
The young man laugh'd, and kick'd the flowers aside,
And there indeed my murder'd mother lay
With her face up to heaven ! imploring mercy
For her unnatural son. Then the old man
Touch'd my cold shoulder with his icy fingers,
And direful pains assail'd me suddenly—
Burnings and shiverings—flashings from my eyes—

And dizzy blindness whirling round my soul—
And arrowy sharpness tingling through my bones—
Until I wept in utter agony.

And all the while I saw my mother's corpse
Lying in peace before her frantic son,
And knew that I in wrath had murder'd her.
More dreadful was my doom than if my hand
Indeed had ta'en her life—for sure in sleep
The soul hath a capacity of horror
Unknown to waking hours. No fetter'd wretch,
Dragg'd on a sledge to execution,
E'er felt such horrid pangs as then stirr'd up
My spirit with remorseful agony.

O Wilmot ! Wilmot ! lead me to my mother—
That I with yearning soul may pour my kisses
O'er the dear frame I murder'd in my sleep.

Wil. Yesterday morning in this very bed
Your mother died a calm and peaceful death,
Blessing her son for all his piety.

Frank. O lying Fiend ! Thou art the very youth
That shook the bloody flowers before my face,
And from the land of dreams hast follow'd me
In ghostly persecution to the light
Of this our upper world ! Say ! where is he,
The grey-hair'd Fiend, in holy vestments clad ?
O Christ ! so wild a likeness in his wrath

Of my best earthly friend !—upon my knees
I cry to thee—I shriek unto thy soul—
Art, art thou Wilmot ?—Let me see thine eyes—
Oh ! they are fill'd with tears ! my brother weeps !
And well he may—for such a wretch as I am
God ne'er before abandon'd to despair.

Wil. Thy soul will climb into the light at last,
Out of its haunted darkness—fear it not.

Frank. The Plague ! the Plague ! the Plague ! did
she not die
Of the Plague ? who saw her buried ? No one—no
one.—

Drive off that madman from my mother's grave,
And let that angel, all array'd in light,
Look down with her sunlike face into the pit,
Her smile will make it heaven. O Magdalene !
Thy spirit comes down from its rest on high
To glorify my mother's funeral.
Yes ! What on earth we love and call it Pity,
In heaven we worship by a holier name,
Mercy ! The seraph whom our Saviour loves.

Wil. She is alive. No tears need fall for him,
Who, waking from a dream so steep'd in horror,
Hath such an one to bless him when he wakes.
Thy Magdalene lives.

Frank. O heartless mockery !

Why camest thou here to talk of Magdalene ?
Thou art leagued with all the world to murder me,
With that sweet name too beauteous to be borne.
I know that she is dead, and am resign'd.
But let her name die too—its syllables
Flame on my brain in letters form'd of fire,
A burning name, all, all that now remains.

Wil. O I would die, so that my friend had peace.

Frank. O Wilmot ! Pity him the Plague hath
 stricken !

He knows not what he says. O pity me !
For I have undergone such mortal pains !
Whether in dreams or in a waking hell
I know not—but my soul hath suffer'd them—
And they have left me powerless as a sail
Hanging in the breathless calm. But list ! I hear
Soft footsteps pattering all around my head—
Are they living feet ?

Wil. Behold thy Magdalene.

Enter MAGDALENE, PRIEST, ISABEL, and CHILD.

Frank. I see a group of faces known in youth—
All but the face of that delightful child—
And she admitted to such company
Must be what she appears—unknown to sin.

[MAGDALENE *kneels down by the bed-side and*
looks on FRANKFORT.]

Magd. Say that thou know'st me, and I shall die
happy.

Frank. Magdalene! for I will call thee by that name!
Thou art so beautiful!

Magd. Enough—enough!

Frank. O Magdalene! why I am lying here,
And why so many melancholy faces
Are looking all at me, and none but me,
I now must never know. I see the tears
Which all around do shed are meant for me;
But none will tell me why they thus should weep.
Has some disgrace befallen me? One word,
One little word from thee will make all plain—
For oh! a soul with such a heavenly face,
Must live but in relieving misery!

Magd. Disgrace and Frankfort's name are far asunder,
As bliss from bale. O press my hand, sweet friend!
Its living touch may wake thee from thy dream
Of unsubstantial horrors. Magdalene
Hath come to die with thee—even in thy arms!

Frank. O music well known to my rending brain!
It breathes the feeling of reality
O'er the dim world that hath perplex'd my soul.
All, all again is clear—I know myself—
Magdalene and Wilmot—Isabel and thee;

Beloved old man !—what may be the name
Of this small creature ?

Child. Margaret Rivington.

Frank. God bless thy sweet simplicity.

Magd. Thy face

Is all at once spread over with a calm
More beautiful than sleep, or mirth, or joy !
I am no more disconsolate. We shall die
Like two glad waves, that, meeting on the sea
In moonlight and in music, melt away
Quietly 'mid the quiet wilderness !

Frank. Sweet image to a sailor !—How my soul
Enjoys this quiet after its despair !
O might I lie for ever on the bed
Of sickness—so that such dear comforters
Might sit beside me ! singing holy airs,
Or talking to each other, or to me,
Even to the very moment of my death.
'The sweetest voice among so many sweet
My Magdalene's ! and I the happy cause
Of all such tender looks and melting tones.

Magd. Frankfort, hast thou look'd upon thy Mag-
dalene's face ?

Frank. (starting up.) O God ! remove that colour
from her cheek—

That woeful glimmer of mortality !

Who brought thee hither from thy distant room ?

Magd. On foot I came, between two loving friends.
I felt not wearied then—but now I feel
That I can walk no more. Let me lie down
And die, as we two will be buried
Close to each other's side.

Frank. O cruel friends,
To let thee walk so far with that pale face,
Weak as thou art, to see a dying wretch
Like me !

[*They raise up MAGDALENE, and lay her on
the bed beside FRANKFORT.*

Magd. I hope thou feel'st no cruel pain ?

Frank. Thy soft whitespotless bosom, like the plumes
Of some compassionate angel, meets my heart !
And all therein is quiet as the snow
At breathless midnight.

Magd. No noise in thy brain ?

Frank. A sweet mild voice is echoing far away
In the remotest regions of my soul.
'Tis clearer now—and now again it dies,
And leaves a silence smooth as any sea,
When all the stars of heaven are on its breast.

Magd. We go to sleep, and shall awake with God.

Frank. Sing me one verse of a hymn before I die.
Any of those hymns you sang long, long ago
On Sabbath evenings ! Sob not so, my Magdalene.

Magd. (sings.)

Of Souls I see a glorious show
Beyond life's roaring flood !
With raiment spotless as the snow,
Wash'd white in Jesus' blood.

His gentle hand their couch hath spread
By many a living stream—
No sigh is drawn—no tear is shed—
One bright—eternal dream !

Frank. I cannot see thee—but I hear thy voice
Breathing assurance of the world to come.
I feel that I am dying—sinking down
As through soft-yielding waters murmuring round me,
Noiseless as air, and almost to be breathed.
It is the calm before the approach of death.
Kiss—kiss me, Magdalene ! I am sinking down—
Wilmot, farewell—old man—kind Isabel—
Kiss—kiss me !

Wil. (to Priest.) Death was in that long-drawn sigh.

Priest. Our friend is gone.

Magd. Yes ! I have kiss'd his lips,
And they are breathless. Let me lay my head

On thy unbeating bosom. O sweet hair,
In stillness shadowing that delightful face
Where anger never came !—I see a smile
No living thing may borrow from the dead !

Priest. She is composed.

Magd. Yes, father ! I am blest.

This were a sight on which despair might look
With stony eyes and groan herself to madness.
But I am dying—therefore o'er the dead
Weep only tears of joy.

Isabel. But o'er the living !
Oh !

Magd. A drowsiness falls on me. Isabel,
Let me sleep in Frankfort's arms. I shall awake
Refresh'd and happy in the approach of death,
And whisper to thy ear my farewell words.

Priest. She falls asleep ! in that most death-like trance
Let us bear Frankfort's body to the grave !
—She may recover ! See her breath just moves
The ringlets on his cheek !—How lovingly
In her last sleep these white and gentle hands
Lie on his neck and breast !—Her soul is parting !
Had ever lovers such a death as this ?
Let us all kneel and breathe our silent prayers !

SCENE IV.

A Churchyard—Midnight—a crowd of People assembled round the mouth of a huge pit dug for the interment of the dead.

1st Man. Keep back, my friends—so that each man
may have

A fair view of the pit :—We all stand here
Upon a footing of equality,
And the less we crowd upon each other thus,
The better shall we see the spectacle.

2d Man. What think ye ? Why the villain at the gate
Would have admittance-money, and stretch'd forth
His long lean shrivell'd fingers in my face,
Half-beggar and half-robber. Lying knave !
Who said he had not drawn a sous to-night :
For in his other palm I saw the edge
Of silver moneys smiling daintily.
So I push'd the hoary swindler to the wall,
And as he dropp'd the coin I saw no harm
In picking up some stragglers for myself.
I wonder where will imposition end,
Thus rife within the dwellings of the dead !

3d Man. This pit is not so wide by one good half
As that in Moorfields. Threescore men were digging
Down its dark sides for four-and-twenty hours,
Yet in one little week 'twas fill'd to the brim.
This is a sorry pit, and would not hold
Above five hundred full-grown corpses. Zounds !
'Tis throwing money away to buy a look
At such a miserable hole as this.

1st Man. Isay stand back—what obstinate fool is this,
All muffled up to the eyes, with his slouch'd hat
Drawn o'er his face—still pressing to the brink,
As he would have the whole pit to himself
And not allow a peep to one beside ?

2d Man. Disturb him not—perhaps he is some wretch
Madden'd by the Plague, and blindly coming here
To bury himself alive, as many do.
Let him leap down ; when once he feels the softness
Of the cold bodies yielding under him,
He will be right fain, if the steep walls allow,
To crawl back to his life and misery.

3d Man. Let's see thy face. Perhaps thou art afraid
Lest the night air may spoil its delicate beauty.

[*He lifts up the man's hat.*]

Stranger. O scoff not—scoff not at a wretch like me.
My friends ! I am no subject for your mirth.
My wife—my father, and four little children,

Will soon within the dead-cart be brought here,
And I must see them buried spite of laughter,
In spite of laughter, agony, or death.
—Laugh on—laugh on—for all the world is nought
But emptiness and mockery. I myself
Will join your laughter—now I fear it not.
For mirth and misery are but different names
For one delusion.—O that hideous grave
Hath sent its earthly coldness through my being,
And I feel blended with the damp black mould.

[He rushes away to a distance, and flings himself down on a tombstone.]

3d Man. Did'st see his face? it was a dreadful sight.
Such face I once remember to have seen
Of a chain'd madman howling in his cell.
Suddenly lifted from the stony floor,
It seem'd all eyes—one gleaming of despair.

1st Man. What signifies a living maniac's face?
Have we not often seen th' unsheeted dead
Rear'd up like troops in line against the walls?
To us at distance seemingly alive,
All standing with blotch'd faces, and red eyes
Unclosed, as in some agonizing dream!

2d Man. Just round the corner of that street—even
now
I stumbled on such hideous company.

1st Man. 'Tis said one midnight
The sexton heard a tolling from that tower,
And entering on a sudden silently
He saw a being wrapt up in a shroud
Pulling the rope with black and bony hands,
And singing all the while a hideous tune
That breath'd not of this world. It turn'd about,
And one glance of its wild and fiery eye
Crazed the poor wretch's brain.

2d Man. Have mercy—Jesu !
Dost thou believe in ghosts ?

1st Man. That midnight bell
Startleth methinks the silent world of spirits.
Who could deny, with that unearthly sound
Tolling through his brain, that something in the grave
Exists more horrible than worms and darkness !
It may be that wild dreams inhabit there,
And disembodied thoughts ! Despair—remorse—
And with his stifled shrieks—Insanity !
Half-conscious all the while that the curse of God
Must be eternal, struck into the grave.

3d Man. That is my creed. Sometimes their chains
are loosen'd :
How else account for all the sighing sounds
That oft at breathless midnight pass us by,
Wailing with more than mortal agonies ?

Strange faces often have been seen at night,
Of persons long entomb'd ; and once a Phantom
Walk'd to the churchyard with a funeral,
Sobbing and weeping like the Christian crowd,
When as the coffin sank, it disappear'd,
And nought but dry bones lay upon the dust.

2d Man. What rumbling sound is that ?

3d Man. The dead-cart comes !

Tis heavy laden, for it moves but slowly.
It still is in the street—yet o'er the pavement
It sounds as dully as o'er trodden turf.
I have driven a hearse with one dead body in it,
And once by midnight o'er a dreary moor
With no one near me but that sheeted corpse,
Till my back felt like ice. But this dead-cart !
See yonder where its lamps, like two great eyes,
Are moving towards us. It comes silently,
For now its wheels are on the churchyard turf.

[*All make way for it as it approaches the pit.*]

1st Man. The ghastly idiot-negro charioteer !
See how he brandishes around his head
A whip that in the yellow lamp-light burns
Like a fiery serpent. How the idiot laughs !
And brightens up his sable countenance,
With his white teeth, that stretch from ear to ear.
Thank God he is no Christian—only a negro.

[*The cart is emptied into the pit.*]

Stranger, (leaping in.) Bury me—bury me.

1st Man. Let him have his will.

I would not venture down into that pit
To help him out for all that he is worth,
However rich he be.

2d Man. Yet 'tis a pity
That his watch, and chains, and seals, (they seem'd of
gold,)
Should thus be lost. I'll leap down instantly
And bring them up, if I'm allow'd to keep them.

[*The negro when about to drive away the cart
descends, and brings him up with a little dead
child in his arms.*]

Stranger. I knew my infant by her shining hair !
Shining at the bottom of the dismal pit,
Even like a star in heaven. I hear her breathing !
—Feel, feel this kiss—for I have rescued thee
From being buried alive. My Emmeline,
Open thy blue eyes on thy father's heart.
There's earth upon her face—Oh ! wet damp earth
On the warm rosy cheeks of innocence.
Now 'tis kiss'd off for ever. Why not speak ?
I will carry thee home unto thy mother's bosom.
There wilt thou speak—wilt laugh and nestle there.
She thought thee dead—but thou art quite alive,

Or rising from the dead—for dead thou art not,
And must not be. Home ! home ! my Emmeline !
Thy mother waits our coming—home ! home ! home !

[*He rushes away with the dead infant in his arms.*]

1st *Man*. Well, let him go.—Ha ! thanks to the kind
moon,

Coming out so brightly from her tabernacle !
There is a perfect prospect of the pit
Down to the very bottom. Now again
'Tis dark as pitch. Hear ! hear the crumbling earth,
How sullenly it sounds when it has reach'd
The ground-rock ! 'Tis indeed a fearful depth !

[*A small procession enters the church-yard—
Voices heard singing a dirge for the dead.*]

REVELATIONS, ch. xiv. verse 13.

I heard a voice from Heaven
Say, “ Blessed is the doom
Of them whose trust is in the Lord,
When sinking to the tomb ! ”

The holy Spirit spake—
And I his words repeat—
“ Blessed are they—for after toil
To mortals rest is sweet.

[*The procession advances*—WILMOT, PRIEST,
&c. *bearing FRANKFORT'S dead body.*]

Wil. There rest a while upon this stone, dear corpse.
I with my own hands now will dig thy grave.
Oh ! when that grave is fill'd—what solitude
All earth will seem to me !

Voice from the crowd. List to the Priest !

Priest. We all are sinful—and thy soul partook
In the frailties of our fall'n humanity.
Therefore, I pray forgiveness to thy sins
From God and Christ. But this I dare to say,
In the dread calm of this wide burial-ground,
That, far as man's heart can be known to man,
A braver, gentler, purer, loftier spirit
Ne'er walk'd this world of trial.—O dear youth !
Sweet boy ! beloved from thine infancy !
Methinks I see thee on thy mother's knee,
Conning thy evening prayer. Art thou the same,
That, with thy bright hair thus dishevell'd,
Liest on a tombstone, dead and coffinless,
About to sink for ever from our eyes !
—One little month—and all thy earthly part
Moulder'd away to nothing—darkly mix'd
With a great city-churchyard's dismal mould !
Where sleep, in undistinguishable dust,

Young, old, good, wicked, beauteous and deform'd,
Trodden under feet by every worthless thing
Human and brute ! in dumb oblivion,
Laugh'd over daily by the passing crowd,
Fresh shoals of wretches toiling for this world.
—Wilnot ! 'tis hard to lay into the grave
A count'nance so benign ! a form that walk'd
But yesterday so stately o'er the earth !

Wil. Long as he lay upon his bed, he seem'd
Only a beauteous being stretch'd in sleep,
And I could look on him. But lying there,
Shroudless and coffinless beside his grave !
—Is it religious, Father, thus to weep
O'er a dead body ! sure his soul in heaven
Must smile, (how well I know his tender smile !)
To see his friends in senseless misery
Thus clinging to the dust.

Priest. His soul in heaven
Looks down with love on such a friend as thou !
Here ! take a blessing with these wither'd hands
Laid on thy honour'd head. Thou wert a friend
In the calm weather of prosperity,—
And then the beauty of friendship show'd in thee,
Like a glad bark that, by her consort's side,
Moved through the music of the element,

A sunny cloud of sail. That consort sank—
And now that lonely bark throughout the gloom,
Labours with shatter'd masts, and sore-rent sails,
Not without glory—though she could not save !
Forgive such image—but I see before me
A living sailor and his best dead friend,
And my soul dreams of the sea.

Wil.

Oh ! who comes here !

[*Enter MAGDALENE distractedly, followed by ISABEL
and the CHILD.*]

Magd. I heard a voice ring through my dreaming
ear,

“ Haste, Magdalene ! to the church-yard—they are
burying

Thine own beloved Frankfort !” Tell me where

Your cruel hands have laid my mariner ?

He shall not lie in the cold grave to-night,

All by himself—Lo ! I his bride am here,

And I will kiss his lips, even if the worm

Should be my rival. I will rest my head

Upon his breast, than icy tombstone colder !

Ay ! the grave shall be my happy nuptial-bed,

Curtain'd with black walls of the dripping clay.

Where is he ? wretches ! have ye buried him ?

Isabel. Oh ! must I tell thee—Magdalene ! to look
round,

That thou mayest see thy Frankfort lying dead !
Behold thy sailor !

[MAGDALENE *flings herself down on the body.*]

Magd. Art thou still on earth !

O cold, cold kisses ! pale and breathless lips !
Are those sweet eyes indeed for ever closed !
—See ! see ! the garb in which he sail'd the deep !
—Thy voyaging all is o'er—thy harbour here !
Anchor'd thou art in everlasting rest,
While over thee the billows of this world
Are with unheeded fury raving on.

Isabel. Hast thou one word for Isabel ?

Magd. My sister !

My love for thee was perfect—Wilmot ! Wilmot !
What art thou doing with thy savage spade ?
Ha ! digging Frankfort's grave !—They shall not bury
thee !

A thing so beautiful must not be buried

[*She faints upon the body.*]

Wilmot (to the Priest.) I leave the dying Lady to
your care.

My soul is strong in agony of love
And unexampled sorrow—and since I
Did undertake to dig my brother's grave,
I will go on with it, until I reach
His mother's coffin !

Voice from the crowd. God will be his help.
That one small grave—that one dead mariner—
That dying Lady—and those wondrous friends,
So calm, so lofty, yet compassionate—
Do strike a deeper awe into our souls,
A deeper human grief than yon wide pit,
With its unnumber'd corpses.

Another Voice. Woe and death
Have made that Angel bright their prey at last !
But yesterday I saw her heavenly face
Becalm a shrieking room with one sweet smile !
For her, old age will tear his hoary locks,
And childhood murmur forth her holy name,
Weeping in sorrowful dreams !

Another Voice. Her soft hand closed
My children's eyes,—and when she turn'd to go,
The beauty of her weeping countenance
So sank into my heart, that I beheld
The little corpses with a kind of joy,
Assured by that compassionate Angel's smile
That they had gone to heaven.

Magd. (recovering from her swoon.) 'Tis cold !
cold ! cold !
Colder than any living thing can bear !
—Have I been visiting my parents' grave,

O blessed lake ! . . . think of me, Isabel,
When thou art walking with that happy child
Through its birch woods, or by yon whispering pines—
Farewell ! that image . . . Isabel ! farewell !

Wil. So clear a voice can ne'er be that of death !
She is recovering.

Magd. Isabel ! look there !
Are those my parents smiling at my side ?
Fold your wings over me—gone—gone to heaven
Are the bright Seraphs !—Christ receive my soul !
[*She dies.*]

Priest. An Angel's pen must write thy epitaph.

Wil. Awful seems human nature in the tears
That old age weeps.

Priest. Forgive such tears !—So young,
So beautiful amid the opening world,
Who would not weep for them !

Isabel. The world will weep,
All the wide world will weep !—I have been sitting
On a high cloud above this woeful city,
With a bright angel at my side. She falls
Down from that sunny region, and my soul
Is wandering now in helpless solitude
Through miseries once seen far below my feet.

Priest. Oh hers will be a memorable name,
Famous in this city—over all the isle

Devoutly breathed in hymns, and oft invoked
In lofty songs and odes to charity,—
Sacred to childhood in its weeping dreams,
By love—and sorrow—and pity saved for ever
From dark oblivion, like the holy name
Of tutelary Saint.

Isabel. Ay ! it will live
Among her native mountains—to all hearts
Familiar music, and the holy house
Where she was born will oft be visited
By mute adorers, and its very dust,
When time hath worn the lowly walls away,
Untrod be held in endless reverence.
Not unforgotten in our shepherds' songs
The maid who far-off perished in the Plague.
The glens so well-belov'd will oft repeat
The echo of her name ; and all in white
An Angel will be seen to walk the valleys,
Smiling with a face too beauteous to be fear'd
On lonely maiden walking home at night
Across the moonlight hills.

Priest. O faithful Isabel !
Is not this churchyard now a place of peace ?

Isabel. Of perfect peace. My spirit looks with eyes
Into the world to come. There Magdalene sits
With those she loved on earth. O mortal body,

In faded beauty stretch'd upon the dust,
I love thee still as if thou wert a soul. . . .

Priest. Friends, let us lift the body.

Isabel. In my arms,

Upon my bosom—close unto my heart
Thus do I lift my Magdalene to her grave !
I kiss her brow—her cheeks—her lips—her eyelids—
Her most delightful hair !—I twine my arms
Around her blessed neck—cold, cold as ice !
I feel her whole frame in my sorrowful spirit.

Priest. Wilmot ! assist our friend. . . .

Wil. (Starting.) The sound of waves
Came for one moment o'er my friendless soul.

Child. O might I go to sleep within the grave
With one so beautiful ! No ghost would come
To frighten me on such a breast as this.
The churchyard even at midnight would appear
A place where one might sleep with happy dreams
Where such an angel lay. O might I die
Singing the hymn last night I heard her sing,
And go with her to heaven.

Isabel. Heaven bless the child !
Yes ! thou art blest in weeping innocence.

Wil. Here is the prayer-book clasp'd in Magda-
lene's hand,

Let us kneel down while thy blest voice is reading
The funeral-service.

Isabel. Oh ! that fatal day
On which we left our cottage ! Magdalene smiled
Oh ! that sweet gleam of sunshine on the lake ! . . .

Priest. Are we all prepared to hear the service read ?

Isabel. All. Come, thou sweet child ! kneel thou at
my side !

Hush ! sob not—for they now are Spirits in heaven !

END OF THE CITY OF THE PLAGUE.

THE CONVICT.

THE CONVICT.

PART I.

SCENE I.

A Room in a Cottage at Lea-side.—The Prisoner's Wife, and a Friend sitting together in the midst of the Family.—The day on which sentence is to be pronounced.

Wife. 'Tis twelve o'clock, and no news from the City
Oh ! had he been acquitted, many hundreds
Would have been hurried hither in their joy,
Headlong into the house of misery,
To shout the tidings of salvation there.
But now that he is doom'd unto the death,
They fear to bring with black and silent faces

The sentence of despair. O God ! to think
That all this long interminable night,
Which I have pass'd in thinking on two words—
“ Guilty ” — “ Not guilty ! ” like one happy moment
O'er many a head hath flown unheeded by—
O'er happy sleepers dreaming in their bliss
Of bright to-morrows—or far happier still,
With deep breath buried in forgetfulness.
O all the dimmest images of death
Did swim before my eyes ! The cruel face
Of that most wicked old man, whom in youth
I once saw in the city—that wretched,
The public Executioner, rose up
Close by my husband's side, and in his hand
A most accursed halter which he shook
In savage mockery—and then grimly smiled,
Pointing to a scaffold with his shrivell'd fingers,
Where, on a sudden, my own husband stood
Drest all in white, and with a fixed face
Far whiter still—I felt as if in hell,
And shriek'd out till my weeping children rose
In terror from their beds.

Friend.

'Twas but a dream.

Wife. No, I was broad awake—but still the vision
Stood steadfastly before me—till I sank

Upon my knees in prayer—and Jesus Christ
Had pity on me—and it came no more.

Friend. Full many a sleepless eye did weep for thee
Last night, and for thy husband. Think it not
That pity dwells but in the hearts of kindred.
Even strangers weep—they think him innocent,
And prayers from many who never saw his face,
For him have gone to heaven—they will be heard.

Wife. Oh ! what are prayers, and shriekings of despair,
Or frantic outcries of insanity,
Unto the ear of the great dreadful God !
Can we believe that prayers of ours will change
Th' Almighty's steadfast purpose ! Things like us !
Poor miserable worms !—All night I cried,
“ Save, save my husband, God ! O save my husband ! ”
But back the words return'd unto my heart,
And the dead silence of the senseless walls
With horrid mockery in the darkness stood
Between me and my God.

Friend. Yet it is written,
“ Ask, and it shall be given thee.”

Wife. Blessed words !
And did they come from his most holy lips
Who cannot lie ?

Friend. They are our Saviour's words.

Wife. Joy, joy unto the wretched ! Hear me then,
O Son of God ! while near my cradled infant,
Sleeping in ignorance of its Father's sorrows,
I fall down on my knees before thy face !
Hear, hear the broken voice of misery !
“ Ask, and it shall be given thee ! ” Holy One !
I ask, beseech, implore, and supplicate,
That Thou wilt save my husband, and henceforth
Will I an alter'd creature walk this earth
With Thee, and none but Thee, most Holy Being,
For ever in my heart, my inmost heart.

Friend. Is not my friend already comforted ?

Wife. The heavy burden of despair is lighten'd.
In this my hour of tribulation •
My Saviour's words return upon my heart,
Like breath of Spring reviving the dead flowers
In our sweet little garden.

Friend. Heaven bless thee,
A smile is on thy cheek, a languid smile !

Wife. I know not why I smiled—a sudden gleam
Of hope did flash across me.—Hark ! a footstep !

Friend. 'Tis the dog stirring on his straw.

Wife. Poor Luath !
Thy kind affectionate heart doth miss thy master.
Mary ! the poor dumb creature walks about
As if some sickness wore him, always wandering

Round, round the house, and all the neighbouring fields,
Seeking the absent. He will disappear
For hours together, and come home at night
Wearied and joyless—for he has been running
No doubt o'er all the hills, and round the lochs,
Trying to find his master's well-known footsteps,
Then will he look with dim complaining eyes
Full in my face, and with a wailing whine
Goes to his straw, and there at once lies down
Without a gambol or a loving frisk
Among the little children. Many a Christian
Might take a lesson from that poor dumb creature.
—When Frank comes home—how Luath will partake
The general happiness ! When Frank comes home !
What am I raving of ? When Frank comes home !
That blank and weeping face too plainly says,
“ That hour will never be ! ” Look not so black,
Unless you wish to kill me with despair.

Friend. I wish'd not to appear so sorrowful.
Within the silent grave my husband sleeps,
And I am reconciled unto the doom
Of widowhood—this Babe doth reconcile me.
But thine is lying in the fearful dar'ness
Of an uncertain fate—and I now feel
A beating at my heart—a cold sick flutter

Boy. Oh ! that he were come back from prison—
Mother !

Last night I fought a boy who said in sport
That my father would be hang'd.

Wife. The little wretch !
What did he say ?

Boy. That my father would be hang'd !

Wife. O God ! the senseless child did speak the truth !
He hath heard his parents talking of the trial,
And in his careless levity repeated
The shocking words—ay—laughing all the while,
Then running to his play—perhaps intending
To ask the master for a holiday
To see the execution. Cursed brat !
What place is sacred held from cruelty,
When it doth leer within an infant's eyes
And harden his glad heart !

Boy. I beat him, mother.
He is a lying boy—he ne'er speaks truth—
And when my father is come home again,
I will ask him if he recollects that saying !
No, I will look at him, and pass him by
With a proud smiling face—I will forgive him
And shake hands with him in my happiness.

Wife. The sun is shining—children, go to play
For an hour out-of-doors.

Boy.

Come, sisters—come !

We will go out-of-doors—but not to play.
Come to the little green-plat in the wood,
And say our prayers together for our father.
Then if we play—'twill be some gentle game,
And all the while we will think upon our father
Coming out of that dark cell.—Come, sisters—come !

Friend. Children so good as these must not be orphans !

Yet I am glad to see thy soul prepared
Even for the worst.

Wife.

My soul prepared for the worst !

No ; that can never be—(*goes to the window,*)—A
cloud of thunder

Is hanging o'er the city ! black as night !
I hear it rumbling—what a hollow growl !
O dreadful building where the Judge is sitting
In judgment on my husband ! All the darkness
Of the disturbed heavens is on its walls.
—And now the fatal sentence is pronouncing.
The Court at once is hush'd—and every eye
Bent on my husband ! “ Hang'd till you are dead,
“ Hang'd by the neck ! ”—As thou dost hope for mercy,
O savage Judge ! recall these wicked words !
For thy own wife who waits for thee at home

Is not more innocent than my poor husband !

[*She flings herself down on the floor in an agony of grief.*]

Friend. Mercy is with the King—and he is merciful !

Wife. What ! what ! do you believe an innocent man
Was e'er condemn'd to die !—To die for murder !
—Did mercy ever reach one so condemn'd ?

Friend. Yes ! I have read of one wretch pardoned
Even on the scaffold—where the light of truth
Struck, like the sunshine suddenly burst forth,
And tinged with fearful joy the ghastly face
Of him who had no thought but that of death.
And back unto his widow-wife went he,
Like a ghost from the grave—and there he sat
Before the eyes of her who knew him not,
But took him for a vision, and fell down
In a death-fit of wilder'd happiness.

Wife. Mercy dwells with the King—and he is mer-
ciful !

O blest for ever be the hoary head
Of our kind-hearted King !—I will away
And fling myself down before his royal feet !
Who knows but that the monarch in his palace
Will see within his soul this wretched cottage,
And, like a saving angel, with one word

Breathe over it the air of paradise.

—Mercy is with the King—and he is merciful !

Friend. Fortune is blind—but justice eagle-eyed,
He will not be condemn'd.

Wife. Give me some water !
My soul is faint with thirst !—Do they not say
That men upon the scaffold call for water ?
—“ Give me a glass of water !” ’tis his voice—
My husband’s voice !—No ! he is not condemn’d !
A thousand voices from these silent walls
Cry out “ he shall not die !”—

Enter a young CLERGYMAN.

Clergyman. Methinks that God hath shed a calm
to-day
Over the house of mourning. Is it so ?

Wife. Thy presence brings a calm. Oh ! one like thee
Should bear good tidings.

Clergyman. Last night in his cell
I saw your husband after his long trial,
And sure I am that never did he sit
Even in this room among his family
With more composed face, or stiller soul,
Than he sat there upon his bed of straw,
With fetters on his limbs.

Wife. Fetters on his limbs !

Clergyman. He felt them not—or if he faintly felt them,

It was not in his soul—for it was free

As a lark in heaven.

Wife. He was not shedding tears !

Clergyman. No—with a calm and quiet face he look'd at me,

And in his eyes there was a steadfast light

By grief unclouded, and undimm'd by tears.

So was it while the blameless man was speaking

Of himself and of his trial : then he spake

Of those he loved, and as he breath'd the name

Of this sweet farm “ Lea-side ! ” then truly tears

Did force their way, but soon he wiped them off,

And raised to heaven a clear unfaltering prayer

For his wife and children—the most touching prayer,

I think, that ever flow'd from human lips !

Wife. Is there no hope, then, after all, of life ?

Clergyman. Yes ! there is hope—though I am forced to say

That he doth stand upon the darksome brink

Of danger and of death.

Wife. I hear thy words,

And I can bear them ! For my suffering spirit

Hath undergone its pains, and I am left,

Even like a woman after travail, weak—
But in a slumbrous quiet that succeeds
The hour of agony. [*She sinks into sleep.*]

Clergyman. My friend ! behold
How quietly that worn-out wretch doth sleep.

Friend. Calm as an infant !

Clergyman. Even too deep for dreams !
How meekly beautiful her face doth smile
As from a soul that never had known grief !
Methinks that God, in that profound repose,
Will breathe submission through her innocent soul,
And she who lay down with a mortal's weakness
May wake in power and glory like an angel
Whom trouble cannot touch.

Enter the Children weeping.

Friend. What ails ye, my sweet children—but speak
softly—

Your mother is asleep.

Girl. O tell it, brother !
For my heart beats so that I cannot speak !

Boy. When we were coming homewards down the
lane
That leads from the Fox-wood, that old dumb Woman
Who tells folk's fortunes, from behind the hedge
Leapt out upon the road, before our faces,

And with that dreadful barking voice of hers,
And grinning mouth, and red and fiery eyes,
All the while shaking at us her black hair,
She took a rope of rushes and did tie it
Like a halter round her neck, and pull'd it tight
Till she grew black in the face ! Then shook her hand
Against our cottage, while my father's name
Seem'd half-pronounced in that most hideous gabble.
Then with one spring she leapt behind the hedge,
Where, as we ran away, we heard her laughing !
And oh ! a long, loud, cruel laugh it was !
As if she laugh'd to know that our poor father
Was now condemn'd to die !

Friend. O wicked wretch ! the silence of her soul
Is fill'd with cruel thoughts—even like a mad-house
With the din of creatures raving. None can guess
The wrath of this dumb savage !

[*The door opens, and the dumb woman enters making a hideous noise, and with signs intimating that some one is to be hanged. The prisoner's wife, wakened by the noise, starts from her sleep.*]

Wife. Thou silent, speechless messenger of death !
Louder thy dumbness than a roaring cannon !
Away—away—thou fury, from my sight !

—God save me from that woman ! or deliver
Her soul from the devils that torment her thus !

[*The children hide themselves, and the dumb woman rushes out with peals of wild laughter.*]

Her face was black with death—a hellish joy
Shone through her idiot eyes—as if a fiend
Had taken that rueful body for a dwelling,
And from these glazed sockets loved to look
With a horrid leer upon us mortal creatures,
A leer of unrepentant wickedness,
Hating us because we are the work of God !

Boy. I wish that she were dead and buried.

Wife. O now that she is gone, hope leaps again
Within my heart—her hideous mummery
Must not be suffer'd to confound me so.
And yet, they say, that she did prophesy,
With the wild motion of her witch-like hands,
That fatal sinking of the ferry-boat
In which whole families perish'd. Hush ! I hear
The tread of feet—it is the Messenger
Come from the City.

[*Enter Messenger with a letter in his hand.*]

Wife. Speak, speak instantly—
Speak ! Why do you come here unless you speak ?
—His face doth seem composed.

Messenger.

Poor Francis Russel !

Now all is over with him—he is condemn'd !

Wife. What did he say ?—Why art thou gabbling
thus,

As none can understand ?—Give me that letter.

[*Tears it open and reads it aloud.*]

“ They have found me guilty, Mary ! trust in God.”

[*She flings herself down on the floor, and her
Children lie down crying beside her.*]

Messenger. I cannot bear the sight—good folks, fare-
well.

Wife. “ My Mary, trust in God.” I cannot trust
In God !—Oh ! wilt thou in thy wrath allow
My innocent husband thus to be destroyed ?——
I cannot trust in God ! O cursed for ever
Be all the swarm of idiot witnesses,
Jury and Judge, who thus have murder'd him,
And may his blood for generations lie
Heavy on their children's souls !

Girl.

O brother ! see

'Tis our poor Father's writing. Yet his hand
Seems never to have shaken.—Innocence,
He used to say, did make small children fearless,
And it will make him happy in his prison,
Till we rush in, and wait till he is pardon'd,
Which will be.....

Wife. Never will he leave his dungeon
But for the scaffold. Would that I were dead,
And all my children corpses at my side,
Never again to wake.....for Mercy is not
In heaven or earth. There is no Providence !

[*Covers her face and tears her hair.*]

Clergyman. These are affecting words from one so
good

And truly pious. But our human nature,
When touch'd at the heart by Misery's icy hand,
Oft shrieks out with a wild impiety,
Against its better will. Yet that shrill cry
Is heard in heaven with pity, and on earth
Is often follow'd by the calm still voice
Of resignation melting into prayer.

Wife, (starting up.) Where art thou ? What impe-
netrable cloud

Hides thee from justice, thou grim murderer !
On whom the dead man's blood, the quick man's tears,
Now call with twofold vengeance ? Drive him forth,
O Fear, into the light, and I shall know him,
Soon as my eye meets his. His very name
Will burst instinctively from my big heart,
And he will answer to it. Where art thou
With thy red hands, that never may be cleansed ?

Friend. 'Tis five weeks to the day of execution,
And he may be discover'd——

Wife.

Execution !

And will they make my husband mount a ladder
Up to a scaffold ? May he rather die
Of anguish in his cell !—Where are my children ?
—O they are weeping even upon my breast !
—Would they had ne'er been born !—Eternal shame
Will lie upon them ! lovely as they are,
And good, and pure, and innocent as angels,
They will be scorn'd and hated !—Save my husband,
Great God of Mercy ! Jesus ! save my husband.
—O many thousand miles of clouds and air
Lie between me and God ! and my faint voice
Returns unto the earth, while the still heavens,
Like the deep sea above a drowning head,
Mind not the stifled groans of agony !

Clergyman. I will go to his cell and pray with him.
He had foreseen his doom,—and be assured
That he is sitting in the eye of God,
With meek composure, not in agony.

The Children. O take us with you !

Clergyman.

For a while, farewell.

The wife's heart now is like a heavy cloud,
But tears will lighten it—God be with you all !

SCENE II.

*The condemned Cell.—The PRISONER in Chains.—
The Prison Clock strikes.*

Prisoner. That was a dreadful toll ! it brings me
nearer

Unto the day of horror. Here am I
Deliver'd over to the fear of death
In cold and rueful solitude—shut out
By that black vault of stone from memory
Of human beings—and, as it would seem,
From the pity of my God ! Who thinks on me ?
The crowd that came to hear my sentence pass'd
Are scatter'd o'er the City, and my fate
Is by them all forgotten, or pronounced
With faces of indifference or of pleasure,
Among the chance discoursing of the day.
And yet my silent solitary cell
Is in the heart of life !—O joyful sound
Of life and freedom in a rushing tumult
Sweeping o'er the streets in the bright open day !
O that I were a beggar, clothed in rags !
Prey'd on by cold and hunger—and with wounds

Incurable, worn down unto a shadow,
So that I knew not when I was to die !
—I hear the blind man singing in the street
With a clear gladsome voice, a jocund song !
What is the loss of eyes !—Thou bawling wretch,
Disturb him not ! With what a hideous twang
He howls out to the passing traveller,
“ A full account of Francis Russel’s trial,
The murderer’s confession.”——Save my soul—
O save me from that hideous skeleton !....

[*Dashes himself on the floor.*]

The JAILOR enters with bread and water.

Jailor. Look up, my friend—I bring you some refreshment.

Prisoner, (staring wildly.) Art thou the executioner ?

Jailor. No. The Jailor.

Prisoner. Is the fatal hour arrived ?

Jailor. I’m not the hangman.

Prisoner. One single drop of wine ! These two last days

Have put my blood into a burning fever,
Yet the thought of water sickens at my heart.
One single drop of wine.

Jailor. I must not give it.

Prisoner. O that a want like this should seem a
hardship

To one condemn'd to die ! My wretched body
With fiery fever wastes my quaking soul,
And rather would I have one drop of wine
Than voice of friends or prayers of holy men,
So faint and thirsty is my very being.

Jailor. What must be must.

Prisoner. O cold and heavy chains !
How shockingly they glitter as they clank !

Jailor. You soon will get accustom'd to their weight.
Observe that ring there runs along the staunchel,
On the stone-floor—so you may drag your legs
From wall to wall with little difficulty,
And in a week or two you'll never heed
The clanking of the iron. The last criminal
Was but a lath of a man compared with you,
And yet whene'er I came into his cell
I found him always merrily at work,
Back back and forward whisking constantly
Like a bird in his cage.

Prisoner. Was he set free at last ?

Jailor. Ay. Jack Ketch set him free.

Prisoner. What was his crime ?

Jailor. A murderer, like yourself. He killed his
sweetheart,

And threw her, though some six months gone with
child,

Into a coal-pit.

Prisoner, (sternly.) Leave me to myself.

Jailor. Why! Man, I wish to be on good terms
with you.

I am your friend. What! many a noble fellow
Hath in his day done murder: in the name
There may be something awkward—but the act
Still varies with the change of circumstance—
I would as lief shake hands with thee, my friend,
As with the Judge himself.

Prisoner, (eagerly.) Dost think me innocent?

Jailor, (ironically.) O yes! as innocent as any lamb.
But hark ye! if that I allow your friends
To visit you at times, you in return
Will let me show you to the country-people
On a chance market-day.

Prisoner. O God of mercy!

Jailor. There will they stand beyond reach of your
arm,

With open mouth and eyes like idiots.
Then look unto each other—shake their heads,
And crying out, “God bless us!” leave the cell,
No doubt much wiser than they came—quite proud
To think how they will make their neighbours shudder

At the picture of thy murderous countenance,
And eyes so like a demon's—we will share
The money, friend....

Prisoner. The money !—What of money ?

Jailor. Why, you are surely deaf.....

Prisoner. Give me the water.

[*Drinks eagerly.*]

Take—take the bread, that I may die of hunger.

[*The JAILOR goes out of the cell.*]

I feel as if buried many a fathom deep
In a cave below the sea, or in some pit
Cover'd o'er with thorns amid a darksome wood,
Where one might lie from Sabbath unto Sabbath
Shrieking madly out for help, but all in vain,
Unto the solitary trees, or clouds
That pass unheeding o'er the far-off heavens !
Five weeks must drag their days and nights along
Through the damp silence of this lonesome cell,
And all that time must I be sitting here
In doleful dreams—or lying on this straw,
With nought but shivering terror in my soul—
Or hurrying up and down with clanking chains
In wrath and sickness and insanity,
A furious madman preying on myself,
And dash'd against the walls.—What spirit moves
These bolts ? O welcome, whosoe'er thou art !

A very demon's presence in this dungeon
Would be a comfort.

[*The door opens, and the young CLERGYMAN enters.*]

Son of righteousness !

Let me fall down and worship at thy feet.

Clergyman. O man of trouble ! put your trust in God.
Morning and evening will I seek your cell,
And read the Bible with you. Rise—O rise !

Prisoner. Despise me not that on this cruel pavement
I dash myself down in fear and agony,
And grovel at your feet ! A pitiful wretch
Indeed am I ; and to preserve my life
Would hang my head in everlasting shame,
Or a lonesome hunger'd in a desert dwell,
Doom'd never more to sleep.

Clergyman. Unhappy man !
Say what thou wilt, for I will listen to thee.

Prisoner, (looking up.) Can you not save me ?—

On a quiet bed,
Surrounded by my weeping family,
I might have died like other mortal creatures
In awful resignation ; but to stand
Upon a scaffold in my native parish,
With a base halter round my abject neck,
Stared at, and hiss'd at, shudder'd at, and scorn'd,

Put out of life, like a dog, with every insult
Cruelly forced on my immortal soul,
And then O Christ, I hear a skeleton
Rattling in chains !—To a madhouse carry me,
Bind me to the floor, that when the day arrives
The hangman's hand may strive in vain to burst
The bolts that chain the Lunatic to life.
I will feign madness. No—Eternal God !
I need not feign, for like a tide it cometh,
Wave after wave, upon my choking spirit
I am bound to a stake within the mark o' the sea,
And the cold drowning mounts up from my feet.

Clergyman. Send peace, O Lord ! unto the sufferer's
heart.

Prisoner. Suddenly, suddenly in my happiness
The curse did smite me. O, my gentle Alice,
Is the sweet baby now upon thy breast ?
The Mother and the Infant both will die.
The dreadful day of execution
Will murder us all, and Lea-side then will be
Silent as the grave. O fearful Providence,
Darken my brain, that I may think no more
On thy wild ways that only lead to death,
To misery, to madness, and to hell !
Is all I say not true ? Didst hear him speak ?
That savage Judge, who, with a hollow voice,

As if he had a pleasure in my anguish,
Continued speaking hours most bitterly
Against a quaking prisoner bow'd with shame ?
He had forgotten that I was a Man !
And ever as he turn'd his harden'd eye
Towards the bar, it froze my very heart,
So proud, so cruel, and so full of scorn.
I think he might have wept, for many wept
When he pass'd sentence on me—but his voice
Was calm and steady, and his eye was clear,
Looking untroubled on the face of trouble.
I did not faint—No—though a sickening pang
Tugg'd at my heart, and made the cold sweat creep
Like ice-drops o'er my body—yet even then
Did conscious innocence uphold my soul,
And turn'd the horrid words to senseless sounds
That ought not to dismay—while he that sat
In pompous robes upon the judgment-seat,
Seem'd in his blind unfeeling ignorance
A verier wretch than I.

Clergyman. We are all blind,
And duty's brow is stern, and harsh his voice.
That Judge is famed for his humanity,
And though no tears were in his solemn eyes,
They flow'd within his heart.

Prisoner.

I do forgive him.

What shrieks were these ?

Clergyman.

Of a poor criminal

In the next cell.

Prisoner.

Condemn'd like me to die !

Clergyman. No ! doom'd to drag out in a foreign land,
Unpitied years of misery and shame.

Prisoner. O happy lot ! who would not leap with joy
Into the ship that bore him to the land
Of shame and toil, and crime and wickedness,
So that with all his load of misery
He might escape from death ! May not I escape ?
Bolts have been riven, and walls been undermined,
And the free winds have borne the prisoner
To the dark depths of safety—never more
To walk the streets of cities, but to dwell
As in the shadow of the grave, unknown
But to his own soul silent as the night !
I feel a wild hope springing from despair !
That shadow was not mine that stood all white
Shivering on a scaffold :—Sampson's strength is here,
And the hard stone to my 'unwearied hand
Will crumble into dust.

Clergyman.

O let us pray !

Prisoner. Yes, I will pray ! pray for deliverance,

And years to come ! O be they what they may,
For life is sweet, embitter'd though it be
With the lowest dregs in the cup of misery !

Clergyman. Shall we kneel down ?

Prisoner. Ay ! they will dance and dance,
And smile and laugh, and talk of pleasant things,
And listen to sweet music all the night,
That I am lying fetter'd to the straw
In dire convulsions. They will speak of me
Amid their mirth and music, but will see not
My image in their souls, or it would strike them
With palsy 'mid their savage merriment,
Clanking these dreadful fetters in their ears.

Clergyman. I will return at night.

Prisoner. O leave me not,
For I am scarcely in my sober mind.
A thousand fiends are waiting to destroy me
Soon as you leave the cell, for innocence
Is found not proof against the pains of hell.

Clergyman. I will bring your wife to visit you.

Prisoner, (kneeling.) O God
Of tender mercies, let thy countenance
Shine on that wretched one. Let this cell lie
Forsaken of thy presence—if thy will—
But, for His sake who died upon the cross,
Let heavenly sunshine fall into her soul !

Temper the wind to the shorn lamb that lies
Upon her breast in helpless infancy !
O ! if our cottage could but rest in peace,
Here could I pass the remnant of my life
In lonely resignation to my fate.
Forsake not her and my sweet family.

Clergyman. Man forsakes man—that melancholy
word

Applieth not to gracious Providence.

Prisoner. I am not then forsaken ?

Clergyman.

Fear it not !

Wrapt in the dark cloud of adversity,
Thou art indeed ; but clouds are of the earth.
Lift up the eye of Faith, and thou wilt see
The clear blue sky of the untroubled heavens.

Prisoner. My soul at once is calm'd—now let us pray.

END OF THE FIRST PART.

PART II.

SCENE I.

*The Morning of the day of Execution—The young
CLERGYMAN and another FRIEND sitting beside the
PRISONER, who is asleep.*

Clergyman. He stirs as he would wake.

Friend. List ! list ! he speaks !

Clergyman. A smile is on his face—a kindling smile.

Friend. Oh ! when he wakes !

Clergyman. Hearken—he speaks again.

Prisoner, (in his sleep.) O, my sweet Alice ! 'Twas
a dreadful dream !

Am I in truth awake ? Come to my heart !

There—there—I feel thy breath—pure—pure—most
pure.

Friend. What a deep sigh of overwhelming bliss !
Hell gapes for him when he awakes from heaven.

Clergyman. Will not the same benignant Providence
That blesseth now his sleep, uphold him falling
Into the shadow of death !

Prisoner. No tears, my Alice !
Weep—weep no more ! Where is our infant, Alice ?
Esther, where art thou ? Mary ? My sweet twins !
—I dreamt that I had bid thee farewell, Alice !
Why is that loving voice so slow to speak ?
Hold me to thy bosom lest the curse return !
Why beats thy heart so.....

Friend. Lo ! his glazed eyes
Are open—but methinks he sees us not.

Prisoner, (starting up.) My family are swept off
from the earth.
—I know not, in the darkness of my brain,
My dreams from waking thoughts, nor these from dreams.
—Yes ! yes ! at once 'tis plain. O heaven of heavens !
Thou canst not be in all thy sanctity
A place so full of perfect blessedness,
As the bed where I was lying in my dream.

Clergyman. We have been praying for thee all the
night.

Prisoner. What ! my dear friends ! good morning
to you both.
Have I been sleeping long ?

Clergyman. Since four o'clock,
And now 'tis almost eight.

Prisoner. Blest was that sleep
Beyond all human bliss ! I was at home,

And Alice in my bosom.....Come, my Friend,
You must not thus be overcome, this hour
Too awful is for tears. Look not on me
As on a son of anguish and despair,
But a Man, sorely stricken though he be,
Supported by the very power of Sorrow,
And Faith that comes a solemn comforter
Even hand in hand with Death.

Clergyman. Most noble spirit !
Fitter art thou with that untroubled voice
To comfort us than to be comforted.

Prisoner. This cell hath taught me many a hidden
thing.

I have become acquainted with my soul
Through midnight silence, and through lonely days
Silent as midnight. I have found therein
A well of waters undisturb'd and deep,
Of sustenance, refreshment, and repose.

Clergyman. On earth nought may prevail o'er in-
nocence.

Prisoner. One night, methought, a voice said in my
cell,

“ Despondency, and Anguish, and Despair,
Are falling on thee ! curse thy God and die ! ” —
“ Peace, Resignation, and Immortal Hope,”
A dewy voice replied. It was a dream.

But the good angel's voice was in my soul,
Most sweet when I awoke, and from that hour,
A heavenly calm hath never left my cell.

Friend. O must we part for ever from our Friend !
Is there no hope ? The hour of agony
Is hastening on, and there is none to save !

Clergyman. Forgive his grief. 'Tis easier to resign
Ourselves unto our fate, than to endure
The sight of one we love about to die.

Prisoner. A little brook doth issue from the hill
Above Lea-side, and, ere it reaches us,
Its course is loud and rocky, crying still
As with a troubled voice. But o'er the green
That smiles beside our door it glideth on,
Just like a dream so soft and silently,
For ever cheerful and for ever calm.
Last night when you came here—I had been thinking
Of that sweet brook, and it appear'd to me
An emblem of my own much alter'd soul,
Lately so troubled, but now flowing on
In perfect calmness to eternity.

Friend. Thinking of Lea-side even unto the last.

Prisoner. Yes ! I will think of it unto the last,
Of heaven and it by turns. There is no reason
Why it should be forgotten while I live.
I see it, like a picture on that wall,

In the silence of the morning, with its smoke,
Its new-waked smoke slow wreathing up to heaven !
And from that heaven, where through my Saviour's
death

I humbly hope to be, I will look down
On that one spot—Oh ! sure the loveliest far
On the wide earth ! too sweet ! too beautiful !
Too blest to leave without a gush of tears.
—They will drive me past my own door to the scaffold ?

Friend. Such is the savage sentence.

Prisoner. It is well.

Friend. We never will forsake you to the last—
But proudly sit beside you.....

Prisoner. Sweet Lea-side !

And I will see my little farm again !
New-thatch'd with my own hand this very Spring—
All full of blossoms is my garden now,
And the sweet hum of bees !—Hush'd be the wheels
As o'er a depth of snow, when they pass by !
That Alice may not hear the fearful sound,
And rush out with my children in her arms.

Clergyman. Fear not—she hath gone into her father's house.

Prisoner. I thought our parting had been past. But
no !

Souls cannot part though parting words be breathed,

With deep abandonment of earthly loves.
Had I not dreamt that heavenly dream last night
Perhaps it had been so—but in that dream
My human nature burst again to life,
And I think upon my widow as before,
With love, grief, shame, dismay, and agony.

Clergyman. I am the father, says our gracious God,
Of the orphan and the widow.

Prisoner. 'Twas a pang !
A passing pang ! (*going to the window.*) It is a sunny
day.

Methinks if I had any tears to shed,
That I could weep to see the fading world
So beautiful ! How brightly wilt thou smile,
O Sun, to-morrow, when my eyes are dark !
O 'tis a blessed earth I leave behind !

[*A noise at the door.*]

Friend. It is not yet the time !

Jailor enters. In half an hour
They will come to fetch the prisoner from his cell.

[*Goes out.*]

Friend. O scowling savage ! What a heart of stone !

Prisoner. I think he is less cruel than he seems.
Sometimes his face hath worn a look of pity,
And his voice soften'd ; but his heart is blind
In ignorance, and harden'd by the sight

Of unrepentant wickedness, and sorrows
Which human sympathy would fail to cure.
He seem'd disturb'd—he feels all he can feel.

Clergyman. Thou art indeed a Christian.

Prisoner. Death is near.

You know my heart, and will reveal it truly
To all who know my tale. The time will come
When innocence will vindicate itself,
And shame fall off my rising family
Like snow shaken from the budding trees in spring.
—They doubt not of their father's innocence?

Clergyman. Unshaken is the confidence of love
In hearts that know not sin—thy memory,
Hallow'd by tribulation, will endure.....

Prisoner. Enough—enough. Here take this blessed
book,

Which from my dying father I received,
And give it to my wife. Some farewell thoughts
I have dared to write beneath my children's names,
Recorded duly there soon as baptized.
And now I have no more to say to man.
Leave me alone a little while—and wait
In the open street, till I appear before you.

Friend. We fear to leave the cell—you look so pale!
As if about to faint.

Prisoner, (holding out his hand with a smile.) My pulse is steady.

Clergyman. We leave thee to thy God !

SCENE II.

Inside of a Cottage.—The Prisoner's WIFE sitting with her FRIEND, surrounded by her Family.

Wife. Speak to me ! let my weeping children speak,
Although it be with sobs of agony.

Friend. See how composed your sweetest children sit
All round your knees ! They weep, and sigh, and sob,
For piteous they and most compassionate.
But nature steals upon them in their grief,
And happy thoughts, in spite even of themselves,
Come o'er them—the glad light of infancy.
Mourn not for them—in little William's hand,
Although his heart be framed of love and pity,
Already see that play-thing ! none need weep
For them a gracious God preserves in bliss.

Wife. 'Tis not on them I think—O God ! O God !

Friend. He soon will be in Heaven.

Wife. A dreadful path
Must first be trod. O 'tis most horrible !

Friend. Since that last scene is present to your soul
I dare to speak of it. The face of death
More hideous seems to us who gaze upon it
Bent towards a friend we love, than to the wretch
Who sees the black frown fix'd upon himself.
The fears of fancy are most terrible,
But when the apprehended misery comes,
The spirit smiles to feel how bearable
The heaviest stroke of fate.

Wife. Thy kind voice seems
To speak of comfort, though the words are dark.
Misery's sick soul is slow to understand,
Yet I will listen, for that gentle voice
Brings of itself relief.

Friend. Calm, unappall'd—
How many mount the scaffold ! Even Guilt,
Strong in repentance, often standeth there
And quaketh not. And will not innocence
Victoriously from that most rueful place
Look o'er the grave—nor death's vain idle show
Have power to raise one beating in his heart ?

Wife. O what a dreadful night he must have pass'd !

Friend. Nay—fear it not—the night before they die,
Condemned men enjoy unbroken sleep,
By mercy sent to their resigned souls,
Calming and strengthening for the morrow's trial.

While we were weeping—his closed eyes were dry,
And his soul hush'd in deep forgetfulness.

Wife. I feel as if I ne'er shall sleep again !
The look with which he flung his body down
On the stone-floor, when I was carried from him,
Will never pass away. O that sweet face
Was changed indeed by nature's agony,
Sunk, fallen, hollow, bloodless, and convulsed !

Friend. O strive to think on other prison-hours,
When, on your knees together, lost in prayer,
You seem'd two happy Beings offering up
Thanksgiving, rather than poor suppliants
Imploring resignation to your doom.

Wife. No. I will think but of that desperate hour
When darkness fell between us, there to brood
Until we meet in heaven. Come near to me,
For I must tell thee how my husband look'd
When wicked men did tear those two asunder
Whom God, and love, and nature had united.

Friend. O spare me—spare me—on yourself have
pity,
And these soft-hearted ones—too apt. to weep !

Wife. Why should I fear to speak ?

Friend. Your Infant wakes !
Here, take it to your breast—

Wife.

Heed, heed it not.

—For hours we sat, and dreamt, and spoke, and wept,
Recall'd our happy life to memory,
From the hour we first met on yon sunny brae !
Our friendship, love, and marriage,—the sweet child
That came to bless our first delightful spring—
All our sweet children ! not forgetting her
Who went so young to heaven. The Jailor came,
Or some one with a black and cruel countenance,
And changed at once our sorrow to despair.
We had not thought of parting—in the past
So buried were our hearts !—such images
Blinded our spirits with the tears of love.
And though we felt a dire calamity
Brought us together in that hideous cell,
We thought not what it was ; till all at once,
The prison-door flew open, and they dragg'd me,
Not shrieking—as perhaps I now do shriek—
But with a cold weight sickening at my heart
That in convulsions drown'd a thousand shrieks,
And brought 'at last a dark forgetfulness
Of my own sufferings, and my husband's doom.
Long streets seem'd passing slowly by my brain,
And fields and trees—until at once I knew
The faces of my weeping family,

And this my Father's house. A dreadful dream !
Yet could I wish to rave of it for ever !

[*Her eldest DAUGHTER steals up with a Book in her hand.*]

Daughter. Here is a book which little Mary Grieve,
(She who has wept as much for my poor Father
As if she were a sister of our own,) .
Gave me a week ago, a happy book,
Which lies below my pillow when I sleep.
Look at it, Mother ! 'tis the history
Of one reprieved when just about to die.
I have read it till it seems a sad true tale
Of all my Father's woe—and when I read it
Even on the darkest day, believe me, Mother,
A gleam of sunshine falls upon the leaves,
Straight down from heaven ! There is a picture—look !
Is it not like my Father's gentle face ?

Wife, (grasping the book.) As sure as God is in
heaven ! it is the same !—

His wife and children too with eyes and faces
Of mad delirious joy all fix'd on heaven !
And well they may—then and for evermore.

Daughter. I show'd it to our clergyman—he smiled—
And laid his gentle hand upon my hair,
And with a low kind voice he bade me hope.

Wife. He bade thee hope !

Daughter. Yes—and I thought he wept.

Wife. He tried to comfort the sweet innocent !

Daughter. Though I should see my father in the cart
Passing our very door.....

Wife. Will he pass our door ?
I will rush out and clasp him, and beseech
Kind heaven to let me die upon his breast.

[*Goes towards the door.*]

I had forgot—we are not at Lea-side.

—Come to me, little William—weep not, child !

Boy. O yesterday we saw a dreadful sight !

Daughter. William—hold your peace.

Wife. What saw my little boy ?

Boy. We went last night to meet with Mary Grieve
Coming from school. And oh ! upon the bridge
Two men were building up—I did not ask them—
They told me what it was—and we ran home
Fearing to look back.

Wife. O shut out the sun,
That blinds my soul with its accursed light !
Close—close the shutters—that eternal darkness
May cover me and my poor family,
And the wild world with all its miseries
Be blank as if we all were in the grave.

[*The shutters are closed.*]

Boy. Mother ! let me come closer to your knees !

Wife. O let the light come in—this silent darkness
Is worse than light—light is but mockery—
But darkness is the haunted tomb of death
Which shuddering nature never may endure.
—I never thought thy face so sad before
As in that sudden light.—(*Clock strikes.*)—What hour?
what hour ?

Friend. Your husband's strife is o'er.

Wife. Praise be to God.
(*Falls on her knees.*) O Thou that art an angel in the
sky,

Strengthen my soul that I on earth may cherish
Those whom thou lovest—these infants round my feet.

Friend. Such prayers go up to heaven—swifter than
light.

Wife. The body shall have Christian-burial !
I will away that no base hand disturb it.
What though it felt the cruel death of shame,
Is it not beautiful and fair to see,
As if he rested from the harvest-toil
In some cool shady place o'erhung with trees ?
It shall be dress'd with flowers—a thousand times,
A thousand thousand times my lips will kiss it,
And when it is laid in the grave at last,
Oh ! will not tears from many hundred eyes

Fall on the coffin, and a hundred tongues
Bless him th' unhappy—him the innocent ?
—Methinks I can endure the daylight now.

[*She goes to the window.*]

O Lord ! yon hill-side is quite black with people
All standing motionless—with heads uncover'd.
Are they gazing all on him ? Alive ? or dead ?—
This is a sight to drive my soul to madness,
To blasphemy and disbelief in God !

Friend. I thought the hour was past.

Wife.

You knew it was not.

Upon the self-same side of that black mount
I saw a pious congregation sitting
Last summer's sacrament ! and now they come
To enjoy an execution. Wretched things !
They little understand the words of Christ.

Friend. It seems in truth most cruel—dreadful show
Of fixed faces ! many a troubled soul
Is gazing there, yet loves the agony
It makes itself to suffer—turns away—
Then looks and shudders, and with cheeks as wan
And ghastly as the man about to die,
Waits for the hideous moment—greedily
Devouring every motion of his eyes
Now only bent to heaven.

Wife.

O senseless wretches !

Thus tamely witnessing the guiltless die.

Rush down upon the scaffold—rend it—crush it

Into a thousand atoms—tear away

Th' accursed halter from his innocent neck,

And send him like a lark let loose to heaven,

Into the holy light of liberty.

—One hour delay the execution !

For from afar the words of mercy come—

I hear them on the wind—“ Reprieve—Reprieve”—

O, gazing multitude ! look grim no more,

But shout until both earth and heaven reply !

Salvation is at hand—Reprieve—Reprieve !

[*She rushes out into the air, followed by her*

*FRIEND and her Children, who endeavour
to restrain her in vain.*]

SCENE III.

A Field in the Country.—Labourers reposing.

The Master. Come, Mary Macintyre—give us a
song,

Then to our work again. Thou hast a voice

So sweet, that even the Linnet on the broom
Might take a lesson from thee.

SONG.

A bird in Spring had built her nest
In a tuft o' flowers on a Castle-wa',
Whare saftly on her bonny breast
The dew and light o' heaven did fa'.

Amang the moss and silky hair
Twa young anes lay in love thegither—
And oh ! their yellow plumes were fair
When glinting in the sunny weather.

Upon that Tower for many an hour
Anither bird would sit and sing,
Or resting on that red wa'-flow'r
In sleep would fauld his gowden wing.

Ae morning at the break o' day
I saw the nest a' pearl'd wi' dew,
That like a net of diamonds lay
Aboon that flower o' freshest hue.

I could na see the bonnie Bird,
She cower'd sae close upon her nest,
But that saft ithersang I heard
That lull'd her and her brood to rest.

Sweet through the silent dawning rung
The pleasure o' that lanely sang,
And the auld Tower again look'd young
That psalm sae sweetly sail'd along.

Mair sweetly breath'd the birchen grove
That wav'd upon the Castle-Hill,
And a' the earth look'd fresh wi' love
The moment that the sang was still !

At gloaming I came back that way,
But I miss'd the flower sae red and sweet,
And the nest whare thae twa birdies lay,
Wae's me ! was herried at my feet.

I wud na weep for the dead wa'-flower,
Sweet birds ! gin I kent where ye were gane,
But the low has blacken'd the auld Mearns-Tower,
And bluid is drapping frae ilka stane.

And he that herried the Lint-white's nest,
And kill'd the auld birds wi' his sling,
He wud na spare the chirping breast
Nor the down upon the wee bit wing.

Master. It is an old traditionary song.
The Maxwells in a body from Hag-Castle
At midnight came, and burn'd the good Mearns-Tower,
With young Laird Stewart and his English Lady,

And their four pretty bairns. They burn'd them all.
The Lady's blood is still upon the stones
Of the west-corner. Many a blashing storm
Hath driven across them, yet they still are red.
'Tis two o'clock, come to our work again !

Young Man. Oh ! I am sick at heart ! this very
moment,
Is my poor Master standing on the scaffold !
Go, go to work—I will kneel down and pray
For his departing soul. *[Kneels down.]*

Master. His hour is come.
Men, women, children, now all rush to see him
In his white death-clothes standing like a ghost !
Ay, lasses, ye may weep—yet will that crowd
Show many a female face—girls like yourselves
In their best gowns adorn'd for holiday,—
And wives that love their husbands—and even mothers
With infants in their arms. Confound their cruelty !
Enough of death there is in this wide world
Near each man's fireside, or his neighbour's house !
Why rush to see him in the open day-light
Standing with fear, and shame, and agony ?

Mary. Oh ! on that sweet hill-side he often sat
Watching his young spring-lambs ! and now even there
Is he about to die the death of shame !

Master. Methinks I see the hill-side all alive,
With silent faces gazing steadfastly
On one poor single solitary wretch,
Who views not in the darkness of his trouble
One human face among the many thousands
All staring towards the scaffold ! some are there
Who have driven their carts with his unto the market,
Have shook hands with him meeting at the Fair,
Have in his very cottage been partakers
Of the homely fare which rev'rently he bless'd,
Yea ! who have seen his face in holier places,
And in the same seat been at worship with him,
Within the House of God. May God forgive them !

Mary. He is not guilty.

Master. Everything is dark.
Last in the company of the murder'd man—
Blood on his hands—a bloody knife conceal'd—
The coin found on him which the widow swore to—
His fears when apprehended—and the falsehoods
Which first he utter'd—all perplex my mind !
And then they say the murder'd body bled
Soon as he touch'd it.—Let 'us to our work,
Poor people oft must work with heavy hearts.
—Oh ! doth that sunshine smile as cheerfully
Upon Lea-side as o'er my happy fields !

[*The Scene changes to a little field commanding a view of the place of execution. Two YOUNG MEN looking towards it.*]

1st Man. I dare to look no longer.—What dost thou see ?

2d Man. There is a stirring over all the crowd.
All heads are turn'd at once. O God of Heaven !
There Francis Russel comes upon a cart,
For which a lane is open'd suddenly !
On, on it goes—and now it has arrived
At the scaffold foot.

1st Man. Say ! dost thou see his face ?

2d Man. Paler than ashes.

1st Man, (coming forward.) Let me have one look.
O what white cheeks ! see, see—his upward eyes
Even at this distance have a ghastly glare.
I fear that he is guilty. Fear has bathed
In clammy dew his long lank raven hair.
His countenance seems convulsed—it is not paleness
That dims his cheeks—but a wild yellow hue
Like that of mortal sickness or of death.
Oh ! what the soul can suffer, when the Devil
Sits on it, grimly laughing o'er his prey,

Like a carrion-bird beside some dying beast,
Croaking with hunger and ferocity !

, [*He turns away.*]

2d Man. He is standing on the scaffold—he looks
round—

But does not speak—some one goes up to him—
He whispers in his ear—he kisses him—
He falls on his knees—now no one on the scaffold
But he and that old Wretch ! a rope is hanging
Right over his head—and, as my Maker liveth,
That demon as he grasps it with his fingers
Hath laughter on his face !

1st Man. How look the crowd ?

2d Man. I saw them not—but now ten thousand
faces

Are looking towards him with wide-open eyes !
Uncover'd every head—and all is silent
And motionless as if 'twere all a dream.

1st Man Is he still praying ?

2d Man. I can look no more,
For death and horror round his naked neck
Are gathering ! Curse those lean and shrivell'd fingers
That calmly—slowly—and without a tremble—
Are binding unto agony and shame
One of God's creatures with a human soul !
—Hark ! hark ! a sudden shriek—a yell—a shout !—

The whole crowd tosses like a stormy sea.

But oh ! behold how still and motionless

That figure on the scaffold !

1st Man. **What can it mean?**

2d Man. Perhaps with one soul all the crowd rise up
To rescue him from death.

1st Man. Let us away
And know what happens. Hark ! another shout
That rends the silent sky. See hats are waved !
And every face is bright—deliverance
Is in that peal of joy—he shall not die.

[Scene changes to the place of execution.]

Sheriff. Bring the man up—and let us hear his story.

[A SOLDIER is dragged along by the crowd.]

Soldier. I am the murderer.

One of the crowd. Here is Stephen's watch—
The watch of the murder'd man—and his very purse—
Both found upon the villain.

Sheriff. 'Tis strong proof.
—What have you got to say against this charge?

Soldier. I robb'd and murder'd him—that's all—'tis true.

One of the crowd. Just as the prisoner rose up from
his knees,
This soldier at my side took out his watch,
And with a cruel and unchristian oath

Proclaim'd the hour, in laughing mockery.
My eye by chance fell on it—and the truth
Burst on my soul. I leapt upon the wretch,
And with a horrid cry he made confession
That he was the guilty man.

Sheriff. Scarce credible.

Soldier. 'Tis true. Last night I saw the Evil-One
In human shape as I sat among my comrades ;
He stood close to my side—invisible
To all but me—and with a fiery eye
He then commanded me to go this day
And see the execution. So I came !
—And now behold the open gates of hell !

Sheriff. The execution cannot thus proceed.

Soldier. A little while—but yet a little while—
And I will come into the roaring pit
To dwell for ever with the damn'd !

One of the crowd. Mad—mad.

Sheriff. Ay ! 'tis the madness of despair and guilt.
Unhalter yon poor wretch—he must be carried
Back to his prison—till the truth appear.

[*The PRISONER'S Wife, accompanied by her
FRIEND and Children, rush through the crowd.*]

Wife. Come down—come down—my husband !
from the scaffold.

—O Christ ! art thou alive—or dead with fear !

Let me leap up with one bound to his side,

And strain him to my bosom till our souls

Are mix'd like rushing waters.

Dost hear thy Alice ? Come down from the scaffold,

And walk upon the green and flowery earth

With me, thy wife, in everlasting joy !

[She tries to move forward, but falls down in a fainting-fit.]

One of the crowd. See—see his little daughter ! how she tears

The covering from his eyes—unbinds the halter—

Leaps up to his bosom—and with sobs is kissing

His pale fix'd face. “ I am thy daughter—Father !”

But there he stands—as lifeless as a stone—

Nor sees—nor feels—nor hears—his soul seems gone

Upon a dismal travel !

[The PRISONER is led down from the scaffold, with his daughter held unconsciously in his arms.]

Prisoner. Must this wild dream be all dreamt o'er again !

Who put this little Child into my arms ? My wife

Lying dead !—Thy judgments, Heaven ! are terrible.

The Clergyman. Look up—this world is shining
out once more

In welcome to thy soul recall'd from death.

Prisoner. Oh ! might that be—but this is not a
dream

From which I may awake.—What, what has happened ?

Clergyman. The murderer is discovered.

[*The Prisoner falls on his knees, and his Wife, who
has recovered, goes and kneels by his side.*]

Clergyman. Crowd not so round them—let the glad
fresh air

Enter into their souls.

Prisoner. Alice ! one word !

Let me hear thy voice assuring me of life.

Ah me ! that soft cheek brings me by its touch

From the black, dizzy, roaring brink of death,

At once into the heart of happiness !

—Gasping with gratitude ! she cannot speak.

Wife. I never shall smile more—but all my days

Walk with still footsteps, and with humble eyes,

An everlasting hymn within my soul

To the great God of Mercy !

Prisoner, (starting up.) O thou bright angel with
that golden hair,

Scattering thy smiles like sunshine through the light,

Art thou my own sweet Daughter ! Come, my Child,
Come dancing on into thy Father's soul !

Come with those big tears sparkling on thy cheeks,
And let me drink them with a thousand kisses.

—That laugh hath fill'd the silent world with joy !

Child. This night I will sit upon your knees once
more,—

And oh ! if ever I offend my Father !

No—never—never !—All our Cottage stands

Just as you left it—the old oaken chair

Will be fill'd to-night,—and our sweet hearth will
burn

As it used to do—upon my Father's face !

—I too will pray—for though a little Child,

God now will hear my prayers !

Prisoner, (looking round.) The fields and hills
Have now return'd into their usual shape,

And all the sunny earth seems beautiful

As in my boyish days !—Oh ! tell me—tell me—

Did I disgrace myself by abject fear

On the way from prison to yon hideous place ?

Clergyman. No—thou wert calm

Prisoner. My friend—O say not so.
For from the moment that I left the prison
Blind horror seized me—and I thought the earth

Was reddening round me from the bloody sky.
 I recollect some faces in the cart
 Glimmering ! and something like a bridge we past
 Over a deep glen fill'd with raging thunder !
 Then all was hush'd—and rose the voice of psalms
 Doleful and wild ! when suddenly I stood
 In the fixed gazing of a million eyes,
 And the feeling of my own identity
 Came like a flash of lightning through my heart.

Crowd. Huzza ! huzza ! the guiltless is set free !
 Lea-side to-night, and all its happy fields,
 Shall shine as bright as in the gladsome day.
 For we will kindle on yon little green
 A bonfire that shall set the heavens on flame,
 And send up sparkling to the far-off stars
 Beams like themselves—bright with deliverance.
 Huzza ! huzza ! The guiltless is set free !

[*The scene closes.*]

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